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THE SWITCHBACK

TO JOHN BRANDANE

LAWRENCE

ARGUMENT

Dr. Mallaby, a country practitioner, believes he has discovered a cure for phthisis. A newspaper proprietor, a financier and a great surgeon are belated at his house in the Debateable Land. They fall in love with Mrs. Mallaby. Mallaby becomes involved in a newspaper stunt and is struck off the Medical Register. His "cure" is found to be based on a fallacy, and the newspapers drop him. The financier and Mrs. Mallaby depart for the Continent of Europe.

Mallaby retires to the Debateable Land and drinks whisky. The surgeon visits him, accompanied by a repentant Mrs. Mallaby and a scheme for rehabilitating Mallaby in his profession.

Mallaby has tested the delights of freedom and will doctor no more. He goes to Palmyra to dig up relics of civilisation. He is accompanied by his wife and her mildly demented aunt, who, throughout the play, acts as chorus, familiar spirit, *deus ex machina* and what not.

The play is intended to demonstrate the Vanity of Human Wishes, the Importance of Being Earnest, the Inevitability of Fate, the Economic Law, the Immortality of the Soul and the Pleasures of Hope.

First produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on March 9th, 1929, with the following Cast:

MRS. MALLABY	Daphne Heard.
CRAYE	Aubrey Mallalieu.
PASCAL	Harry Wilcoxon.
BURMEISTER	Frederick Victor.
A CHAUFFEUR	Howell Davies.
WILLIE	Angus L. McLeod.
MAID	Phyllis Shand.
MRS. ANDERSON	Florence Lynn.
AUNT DINAH	Frances Ross Campbell.
MALLABY	Bligh Chesmond.

A second version was presented at the Malvern Festival, August 8th, 1931, with the following Cast:

MRS. MALLABY	Gillian Lind.
CRAYE	Eric Stanley.
PASCAL	Ralph Richardson.
BURMEISTER	Edgar Norfolk.
MALLABY	Cedric Hardwicke.
MAID	Peggy Morton.
MRS. ANDERSON	Isabel Thornton.
CHAUFFEUR	Howell Davies.
WILLIE	Leslie Holland.
AUNT DINAH	Frances Ross Campbell.

In each case the Play was produced by H. K. Ayliff.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

VISCOUNT PASCAL OF LITTLE WOLDINGHAM

MR. BURMEISTER

SIR ANTHONY FOTHERINGHAM CRAYE, BART., K.C.V.O., F.R.C.S.

MRS. MALLABY

DR. MALLABY

A MAIDSERVANT

MRS. ANDERSON

A CHAUFFEUR

WILLIE ANDERSON

AUNT DINAH

ACT I

Scene: DR. MALLABY'S *library and general work-room. It is dark except for a dying fire L. When the lights go up it will be seen to be a desperately untidy room. Books, papers and journals are scattered everywhere. There are three big bookcases and a file cabinet—the only tidy thing in the room. A small, cheap desk with a swivel chair stands in the middle of the worn carpet. A small laboratory bench is at the window L.C., and is crowded with culture tubes, bits of cotton-wool, a Bunsen burner, a battered still, an antiquated incubator, a microscope and other technical devices. There are two old but comfortable saddlebacked chairs by the fireside. Maps on the wall and photographs illustrating archæological feats.*

An electric bell rings insistently for two minutes. Bolts are shot and a door R. which leads into a passage is opened. Voices are heard. A pretty GIRL *in a black-and-gold kimono enters and switches on the light.*

THE GIRL. Will you please come in here? I am so sorry my husband is out. He was called out at two to a maternity case twenty miles away. I expect he will be back quite soon now. I am so sorry.

[*While she is speaking three heavily-coated men come in. They are* SIR ANTHONY CRAYE, *the surgeon;* LORD PASCAL, *the newspaper proprietor; and* MR. BURMEISTER, *a gentleman interested in finance. The first two are big men, and all three are firm-footed and sure of themselves. They are well-preserved men of fifty or thereabouts, dressed in holiday tweeds, and obviously all of the same social standing, and that an important one.*

SIR ANTHONY. My dear lady, you mustn't apologise to me. I am a doctor myself. I quite understand. Craye is my name. These are my friends, Lord Pascal and Mr. Burmeister.

They have known me long enough to appreciate the—um—unconventionalities—of a doctor's household.

MRS. MALLABY (*busy with the fire*). How do you do? Lord Pascal? (*She rises in some confusion.*) Oh, not *the* Lord Pascal?

PASCAL (*in a loud and hearty voice*). Well, I know of nobody else of that name. I chose it myself, and I think I steered clear of any other fellow's copyright.

MRS. MALLABY. Lord Pascal of the Newspaper Trust?

PASCAL. "Lord Pascal of Little Woldingham," the Earl Marshal puts it.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, do forgive me being so rude, but we see so few people here. Won't you all sit down, please? You must be tired. There's a thermos flask waiting for my husband, and I think the whisky is here—yes, it is. What a place to keep whisky! Isn't the fog awful?

BURMEISTER. Romantic, though. Here are we, three low-browed cut-throats appearing out of the thick and murky night at the door of a lonely and lovely fairy princess who does not even ask our business. I like fogs.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, your business is quite easy. Your car has broken down. Cars often do, at the Devil's Leap. Even quite good ones—very good ones. Look here, I can't stand talking to you like this. Will you make yourselves as happy as you can while I dash upstairs and put on some things?

BURMEISTER. Oh, but that will spoil it all!

PASCAL. No, no.

SIR ANTHONY. Bless my soul, don't think of changing. We're three respectable doddering old uncles. Besides, you ought to be in bed. We'll make ourselves quite comfortable here, quite comfortable. Pascal's man is walking on to the next village to find a garage and a conveyance. Mr. Burmeister found out that your garage was empty before he rang the bell.

MRS. MALLABY. But, Lord Pascal, your poor man! The next village is miles away. He'll never find it in this fog.

PASCAL. Madam, if I send a man to find a tin-tack in a jungle, he must bring me back that tin-tack.

BURMEISTER. It's quite true, really. Pascal wouldn't be a Lord and a millionaire if his servants ever let him down.

PASCAL. Millionaire yourself.

MRS. MALLABY. But you don't know this place. It's most awfully dangerous and difficult in a fog.

PASCAL. It is my job to know everything.

MRS. MALLABY. How very clever of you, Lord Pascal, but still . . .

SIR ANTHONY. The man has been over the road before, Mrs. ——. I don't think I know your name. I don't think you need worry.

PASCAL. Besides, it will serve him right if he breaks his infernal neck. A broken camshaft! I never heard of such a thing!

BURMEISTER. Sir Anthony Craye, I notice, is distressed by his ignorance of the name of his hostess. Might one ask that he should be enlightened?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, Mallaby. My husband is Dr. Mallaby, you know—or rather you probably don't know. Nobody ever will if he buries himself for ever in a hole like this. I say, you're not Sir Anthony Craye, the famous abdominal surgeon?

SIR ANTHONY. Famous, perhaps. Abdominal, well, my friends *do* make remarks! Yes, I am Sir Anthony Craye.

MRS. MALLABY. Lordy! I don't know what George will say! Look here, you must let me go. I'd put you up in the spare room if I could, but Auntie Dinah's in that, and . . . Please help yourselves out of the thermos and put another lump of coal on the fire, and there are the glasses. There's a tap over there by the basin, and a kettle if you want some hot water. I'm so sorry the room is so untidy, but he won't let me touch a thing. He's not a bit like an ordinary husband. Oh, thanks so much, Mr. Burmeister.

[MR. BURMEISTER, *with old-world courtesy, holds the door open for her. There is something Oriental in his pose.* MRS. MALLABY *goes out all of a flutter.*

PASCAL. Nice little thing that. By George, yes.

[SIR ANTHONY *prepares the toddy.*

BURMEISTER. She has entangling eyes. (*He warms his hands at the fire.*)

PASCAL (*roaming about*). He reads a lot, this fellow. Eh? By George, I don't know if old Lapthorne himself has a library like this. Deep stuff, too. (*To* SIR ANTHONY.) I say, Toad, do G.P.'s always read this deep stuff? I thought they never opened a book.

SIR ANTHONY. I've known some quite well-read general practitioners.

PASCAL. What does a brainy fellow want to bury himself out here for—and barge out twenty miles on a foggy morning when he could earn a couple of guineas a thousand writing for my papers? I don't suppose they even pay him, either. Hello! Here's a book by you, Toad! "The Ætiology, Pathology, Diagnosis and Treatment of Morbid Conditions of the Mesentery." Not what I should call a snappy title.

SIR ANTHONY. Eh! Let me look. Yes, by Jove! The new edition, too. Interesting chap, this. And he's got Mulfrey, and Pigg and Puccini and that old fool Blerholtz—all three editions, by Jove! And he's got me on the Pancreas, too. Knows his work, evidently. Other interests too. Geikie, Dawson, Elliot Smith, Doughty's "Arabia Deserta," "Cities of the Desert," "Palmyra" . . .!

BURMEISTER. Palmyra? Oh, the City of Palms. It isn't on my beat. Right in the middle of the Syrian desert.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, hello! Bless my soul, here's a colorimeter at the back of Bennachie. I say! We must talk to this fellow.

PASCAL: Here's Milton on the mantelpiece. "Of man's first disobedience and the fruit . . ."

BURMEISTER (*at the desk*). Oh, the poet. I thought you meant the disinfectant. He appears to be engaged in research work of some sort. There are yards of figures here. Do have a look at them, Toad. I don't understand them.

SIR ANTHONY. Um. Yes. Not much in my line of work. But . . . Stop a bit—My Lord Pascal, will you pass me a toddy? This is interesting.

PASCAL. What is it? I wish Mrs. Doctor would come down again. I've taken quite a fancy to her.

[BURMEISTER *is looking fixedly at* SIR ANTHONY, *who is absorbed in the papers before him.*

SIR ANTHONY. Rather thick, reading a man's private papers. But . . . By Jove, he thinks no small beer of himself, this chap. I don't suppose either of you ever heard of Tarantanov's Theorem? But I forgot, it's never mentioned in the Financial Columns of "The Times."

BURMEISTER. If it were of any use it would be.

SIR ANTHONY. Good God! And you call yourself an educated man! Do you find Shelley and Keats and dear old Montaigne in your infernal swindling stock markets?

BURMEISTER. In one form or another, yes. Ask Bubbles.

PASCAL. Here is your medicine, Toad.

SIR ANTHONY. I'll tell you about Tarantanov's Proposition. . . .

BURMEISTER. I thought you said Theorem.

SIR ANTHONY. It is the same thing; and a nicer word, don't you think?

PASCAL. Let us have this proposition.

SIR ANTHONY. Tarantanov's Proposition is nothing less than the whole law and the prophets of germ infection. It puts down in clear and immovable terms the Laws that Pasteur and Ehrlich were fumbling for. It is the Apostles' Creed of Modern Pathology. Well, this little shaver of a cough-mixture broker proposes to turn it upside down.

PASCAL. She walks nicely. Good action.

SIR ANTHONY. You are past praying for! I leave you to the thoughts of your salacious heart. But, Burmeister. Think of it! It is like a village cobbler defying the boot trust. And, by Gemini, he does it very well! Very well. This is about the . . . Let us see his case reports. (*He goes to the file.*) Oh, Lord, I might have known! Another tuberculosis cure.

[BURMEISTER *had ceased to pay any attention to* SIR ANTHONY *and had been staring at a photograph on the mantelpiece. He spins round on his heels.* PASCAL *puts down a book he has been yawning over.*

PASCAL. Eh? What?

BURMEISTER. A cure, eh? Anything in it?

SIR ANTHONY. How much ever is in it—except for the promoters? I'm a disappointed man. I was quite carried away for a bit. And it's only another cure. I have seen two thousand and one tuberculosis cures.

PASCAL. You've seen two thousand and one tuberculosis cures, have you? I've seen two thousand and one hosses start, but didn't any of them ever win, hey?

BURMEISTER. Life's very simple for you, Toady. When you have to judge a fellow's work you simply ask yourself, "Do I know the fellow?" If you don't know the fellow, he can't be any good, because if he'd been any good you'd have known him, Toady, wouldn't you?

SIR ANTHONY. You know perfectly well that I keep an unusually open mind on everything connected with my profession. But . . .

PASCAL. Charming, that. Isn't it, Ikey?

BURMEISTER. I love it. What a type you are, Toady!

SIR ANTHONY. I am nothing of the kind. I'm an ordinary honest man. I'm not surprised you can't recognise one when you see him. All I said was . . .

PASCAL. All you said was that you've no interest in any bit of work that isn't turned out by your own little ring.

SIR ANTHONY. I said nothing of the sort.

PASCAL. You as good as said it. Don't lose your temper. Go on with the papers.

BURMEISTER. Do, Toady. There may be an idea you could steal.

PASCAL. There's a fortune in a really hot cure. You know that, Toady.

BURMEISTER. Pascal and I will finance you. Go ahead, Toady.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, shut up! It's not a subject I care to make fun of.

BURMEISTER. I know. It was stupid of us. But seriously, why not go into it?

SIR ANTHONY. Because there's nothing in these tuberculosis cures.

PASCAL. How do you know? Why not?

SIR ANTHONY. Well, in this case the fellow obviously can't have had the training necessary . . .

BURMEISTER. Yes, but his papers impressed you. I could see that. Have another look at the case records.

PASCAL. Yes, do, Toady! Don't you realise that tuberculosis is a serious business? I forget the death-rate exactly, but it's colossal. We mustn't leave any avenue unexplored.

SIR ANTHONY. Bubbles, it may seem remarkable to a journalist, but doctors have no time to spend in exploring avenues or finding formulæ, or creating atmospheres, or even making gestures. They are too busy. Read them yourself if you like.

PASCAL. I? Good God! no! But I'll send Lapthorne, my Medical Correspondent, down to go into it if you think it's worth while.

SIR ANTHONY. Now, please. Don't let's have another of your brain-waves, Pascal. I know them only too well. Listen, Bubbles. When you and I were at Magdalen you were known as the Man who Didn't Care what he Broke. Don't you realise that every time you boom some infernal quack you break thousands of hearts? You raise hope in the poor devils, and your papers bully and cajole them into spending their last few coppers on heart-break and disappointment. You are a good enough chap in your way, but every time you aid and abet those hounds who rob the sick and the dying I feel I want to kill you.

PASCAL. Oh, do you? Well, every man to his trade. Killing is yours. Serving the Public is mine. Will you pass that decanter, Ikey? Out of Toady's way.

BURMEISTER. My dear old Anthony, you know very well

that Bubbles makes mistakes sometimes, but they're honest mistakes. And, take him all over, he has boomed fewer absurdities than your own profession has boomed. You said yourself that there was good stuff in this man's work. Vell, —well, good work isn't so common in these days. Surely the public ought to know it when it comes along? Why can't you be fair—to Pascal and to this chap Mallaby? It may be the goods all right. How can you tell by only glancing at his case-sheets? I may tell you, Toady, a good many influential people are becoming irritated at this blind prejudice you fellows have against anything new or anything by an unknown man. Now, I've got an instinct there's something in this. Do have a look at his cases, and if you say the word, Bubbles and I will raise a quarter of a million for a research laboratory within a fortnight.

SIR ANTHONY. You'll advertise Dr. Mallaby, will you? You know what we do to doctors who advertise? For the love of decency, leave the poor devil alone. You'll only get him into trouble.

PASCAL. Oh, that's good! That's damned good! We don't advertise, we professional gents! Whenever a little Marquis has appendicitis, who has his photograph in all the picture papers and his name in block capitals in the Court Circular? Old sea-green, incorruptible Toady Craye!

SIR ANTHONY. That's different.

PASCAL. How different?

SIR ANTHONY. You laymen cannot be expected to understand these things.

PASCAL. Laymen! As Ikey says, there are some damned influential laymen—of whom I am one—who are sick to death of your mumbo-jumbo. I tell you, people won't wait to be cured according to Cocker. They're all out for health, and, if they can get it, they won't be bothered with a solemn bore shaking his head over them and murdering them strictly by the book of words.

SIR ANTHONY. Burmeister, you are a bit of a musician.

BURMEISTER. Yes. And then?

SIR ANTHONY. Will you explain to Pascal the principles of vamping? One grasps a few of the bass notes with one's left hand, Pascal, and picks out the air with one's right. You and your public prefer such music to that of Cortot, but Burmeister here will tell you that it is not music at all. It requires years of practice and careful technique to make a musician. I assure you that the treatment of disease is no simpler matter.

PASCAL. Well, what you call vamping gets results, anyhow.

BURMEISTER. Yes. You know very well that the swelling in my ankle I took round to you every day for months vanished in a week at the touch of an osteopath. A quack you would call him.

PASCAL. Come along, Toady. How would you explain that?

SIR ANTHONY. How would I explain wireless to a Hottentot?

PASCAL. My dear sir, I employ hundreds of bright young men who could explain wireless to a gorilla. Why don't you take the Press into your confidence? They'd explain for you all right. Or are you afraid of explanations?

SIR ANTHONY. By Jove! I am afraid of *your* explanations.

BURMEISTER. We could call it the Craye Research Laboratory. It would pay, I think.

SIR ANTHONY. What the devil are you talking about?

BURMEISTER. The Laboratory.

[*Enter* MALLABY. *He is a mild little man in a bowler hat, a threadbare coat buttoned to his chin, and cloth and rubber overshoes. He carries a battered black bag. He is about forty-five and has a greying moustache and a faint impediment in his speech. Behind his mildness there is a hint of terrier obstinacy.*

MALLABY. Well, gentlemen?

SIR ANTHONY. Dr. Mallaby?

MALLABY. That is my name.

SIR ANTHONY. I am Sir Anthony Craye, the surgeon. These are my friends, Lord Pascal and Mr. Burmeister. We

were belated in the fog, and Mrs. Mallaby has very kindly made us comfortable in your absence.

MALLABY. That's right. That's quite all right. The f-fog has lifted, I think. (*He pulls up the blind and lets in daylight.*)

PASCAL. By George, the sun is shining!

MALLABY. Yes. God rolled up the fog as I came down the valley. It was a very singular sight. We have many fogs here, and they roll away like—like great maps. It uplifts the spirit, don't you think? Pharaoh and his chariots behind you, and no hope anywhere, and suddenly the sea throws up its arms and lets you pass—as it did to those damned Jews so long ago. Most unfortunately, I think. (*His rather vacant regard takes in* BURMEISTER *and he becomes distressed.*) Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't notice—I mean—what a terrible thing to say! But perhaps you aren't——

BURMEISTER. I am a Jew, as a matter of fact. Never mind. It is some centuries now since we became used to that particular kind of remark.

MALLABY. But I didn't intend . . . Oh, good Lord, that comes of living in the country and thinking aloud! And now I'm making it worse by talking about it. It's like me. It's very like me.

PASCAL. Mr. Burmeister doesn't mind a bit, really. And it doesn't matter if he does. A Jew has no more right to object to being laughed at than a Scotsman has.

MALLABY. I wasn't laughing at him. I never laugh at anybody—but myself. Life's too serious.

PASCAL. Then why be ashamed of saying what you think? I never am.

MALLABY. But I didn't really think—I mean to say——

BURMEISTER. Please forget all about it, Dr. Mallaby. If I don't mind, I don't know why you should.

MALLABY. No, no. But all the same . . . these little things *do* matter. My attitude on the question is rather difficult to explain. . . . [*Enter* MRS. MALLABY.

SIR ANTHONY. Ah, Mrs. Mallaby! That didn't take you long.

BURMEISTER. To me it seemed long.

PASCAL. Your husband has been airing his racial antipathies, Mrs. Mallaby.

MRS. MALLABY. How like George! And he hardly knows you!

MALLABY. Oh, I know them quite well by repute. That is, two of them, I do. Not you, sir (*to* BURMEISTER), but the other two. Sir Anthony is one of the heads of the profession, and I am proud to entertain him. An archangel unawares, in a way. And although I haven't read your newspapers, Lord Pascal, I have no doubt they are very good. If you understand me, I have no prejudice against your journals, but the life of a busy G.P. leaves very little time to waste—I don't mean that exactly, you know. I am quite sure your papers are worth the money to a certain class of people. . . .

MRS. MALLABY. George. Go away and change at once. Isn't he awful, Lord Pascal? Isn't it a very good thing we see absolutely nobody? Run away now, George. I have told Marion to hurry on the breakfast, so you needn't go to bed. It's nearly seven o'clock, anyhow.

MALLABY. You will be all right, gentlemen? My thermos flask. . . .

MRS. MALLABY. Go away at once. [*Exit* MALLABY.

George is the most darling person, but he *will* talk! I think it's because he hates being spoken to. I just came in to get him away. Now will you excuse me? My girl is barely half awake and entirely imbecile. I must run to help her. You poor things must be dying of hunger . . . let alone George.

SIR ANTHONY. I'm afraid we've eaten all his sandwiches.

MRS. MALLABY. He never noticed. He never notices anything. You will excuse me, won't you?

[*Exit* MRS. MALLABY.

BURMEISTER. Poor girl!

PASCAL. It's a damned shame! The clever, plucky little woman to be buried in this wilderness with a woolly-headed sheep like that! It's worse than a Hindu funeral. What do

you call it—when the fellow dies and they cremate the widow too?

BURMEISTER. A suttee.

PASCAL. That's it. I knew it had something to do with middle-class furniture. That's the benefit of Pelmanism. You remember things at once.

SIR ANTHONY. And what do you think now of your great benefactor of the human race?

PASCAL. Well, he's not a gentleman. But, damn it, geniuses often aren't. You can't expect everybody to go to a Public School. They wouldn't be Public Schools if you let in everybody.

BURMEISTER. He has a curious, intriguing, evasive personality. I should say there was something in him.

PASCAL. Do you think so, Ikey? I don't agree that he's got a personality, but I'll give him one ready made out of stock if you think he's a winner.

BURMEISTER. I think he's a winner. What do *you* say, Toad?

SIR ANTHONY. He seems a decent little fellow enough. Brains, I should think. But there's no job at which a man's judgment is so likely to play him false as in this research business. He hasn't got the apparatus, besides. However, I'll talk to him after breakfast.

BURMEISTER. We *have* been invited to breakfast, haven't we?

PASCAL. Of course we have. They wouldn't turn us out in the road at this time of the morning if we were labourers with thirty shillings a week; and we pay income tax on a quarter of a million, between us.

SIR ANTHONY. I suppose you're right. But it does seem rather an invasion. Some of these country practitioners are devilish hard put to it to make ends meet.

PASCAL. Don't you believe it, Toady. Even in these days they do a bit of bleeding. I bet you were a lot harder up in the days you operated on your first fine careless rupture.

BURMEISTER. Well, I've a feeling he won't be hard up

long, anyhow. He never had a luckier stroke in his life than at the moment the fog threw us up on his doorstep. If there is anything in this discovery of his, we'll make him.

SIR ANTHONY. I wonder.

PASCAL. What do you mean, wonder? Ikey and I have made more men than you've defaced, you belly-slitting old homicide.

SIR ANTHONY. Bubbles, you're an ill-bred dog.

[*Re-enter* MALLABY.

MALLABY. I say, would you like to remove the traces of travel? I'll show you the way. I am told breakfast will be ready directly. I'll lead the way if you don't mind, Sir Anthony. The staircase is rather dark and narrow. You may leave your overcoats in the passage.

[*Exeunt,* MALLABY *babbling.* MRS. MALLABY *enters, waits impatiently at the door for her husband, and pounces on him when he returns.*

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, Georgy Porgy! How gorgeous! How gorgeous!

MALLABY. In what way gorgeous, Dolly dear?

MRS. MALLABY. Don't you see? Your discovery! The tuberculosis one! Sir Anthony Craye! The President of the Royal Academy of Medicine and Surgery! And the other two are the most powerful men in Britain.

MALLABY. Dear me, dear me, dear me! Don't excite yourself into the vapours, darling. You're talking like Pascal's headlines. Your nose is glowing with emotion. I've heard old Craye speak at the Congress and I've read his stuff, and the man's a pompous ass, deary. He couldn't possibly understand what I'm driving at. Besides—besides—no, seriously, I can't crawl and truckle for my own advantage to a guest under my roof. My work is big work. I feel it. I know it. Let it stand by itself without assistance from distinguished and benevolent boobs.

MRS. MALLABY. That's all very fine and noble and aggravating, but what happened when you tried to get a paper read before the Medical Association?

MALLABY. That was only a record of some of the preliminaries. Those chaps couldn't be expected to follow. Besides, it was the wrong place. The Royal Society is the place, if the work is completed in my lifetime.

MRS. MALLABY. In *your* lifetime? And what about my lifetime? You know what a job I had getting you to offer a paper to the Association. Lord knows how you'll find the pluck to send it up to the Royal Society. Georgie, it's all very well to be haughty and despise influence, but you can't get anywhere without it. Not anywhere! Georgie, I'm sick and tired of all this. There's life and shops and theatres and dresses and dances for me, and glory everlasting for you lying on that desk, and you know it, and you're not man enough to lift a finger to get me out of this horrible, horrible place!

MALLABY. I thought you were happy here. Upon my soul I did, Dorothy. Besides, I've told you a hundred times the work isn't ready for publication. There are years of control experiments and verifications still to do. . . . Oh, damn! Dorothy, don't cry! Dorothy, you know I . . .

MRS. MALLABY. If it's big work and you are a big man, why don't you assert yourself? Why shouldn't people know? You're not living at all if you don't express yourself!

MALLABY. Now you are talking like those dirty little beasts who write novels in London. You don't understand.

MRS. MALLABY. Don't I? Don't I? Well, *I'll* talk to Sir Anthony Craye. You see if I don't.

MALLABY. Oh, you can't. You mustn't. He'd snub you.

MRS. MALLABY. I'll talk to Mr. Burmeister, then. Or Lord Pascal. He won't snub me.

MALLABY. Darling, you must leave my work to me. It's—it's too important to me to be the subject of breakfast-table talk with gilt-edged ignoramuses. I've tried to make you understand how I look on this tuberculosis business. It's my whole life. It's myself.

MRS. MALLABY. But what—what—what's the practical use of it? For all the good you do except perhaps for a few of

your panel patients you might as well be collecting tram tickets. You've done me out of the life I'm entitled to lead for nothing. Do you hear? "Nothing!" Work's a thing that *does* something. And you do nothing but poke and peer and write little cards and talk big and forget appointments. I'm going to make this work of yours *do* something. If you won't help me I'm going to help myself.

MALLABY. Dolly, look here. . . . Do you think I've never wanted to—to get away? . . . (*He laughs suddenly.*) Very well, then. I may not know much about this great world on which you appear to be such an expert; but if you persuade Craye and two hard-headed business men to accept a proposition when you don't understand the elements of it yourself—well, you'll surprise me very much. You can talk and talk and they'll pretend to listen because you're pretty, but you needn't expect to cut any ice.

MRS. MALLABY. We'll see.

[*Re-enter* CRAYE, BURMEISTER *and* PASCAL.

PASCAL. We were looking at the view from your upstairs window, Mrs. Mallaby. By George, what dreary hills! Like great sulky ogres all in chains. Most depressing spot.

MRS. MALLABY. One learns to love one's home, Lord Pascal.

PASCAL. A love that would take some learning, if I may say so.

BURMEISTER. I think one must be born among these hills to love them, and Mrs. Mallaby was not born here, I think. You were born among the flowers, Mrs. Mallaby.

MRS. MALLABY. Yes, in Kent.

BURMEISTER. And you have been learning to love all your life?

PASCAL. Don't take Burmeister for your tutor, Mrs. Mallaby. He is too old and ugly.

SIR ANTHONY. Mrs. Mallaby, you would not think that self-deception could go so far, but these two gentlemen think they are being clever when they talk in that way.

MRS. MALLABY. I think it's perfectly beautiful talk.

George—Dr. Mallaby—never talks about anything but his old patients—and his discovery.

BURMEISTER. He has made *another* discovery, has he?

MALLABY. Don't be a damned fool, Dorothy! I haven't made any discovery. It's just—I'm just doing—a bit of work.

SIR ANTHONY. On tuberculosis, I gather.

MALLABY. Well, that comes into it.

SIR ANTHONY. Rather a tall order to tackle away from libraries and laboratories and assistants.

MALLABY. You can't wrestle with an angel in the National Sporting Club.

PASCAL. Oh, why not? Why not?

MALLABY. I d-doubt whether you have had much experience with angels, Lord Pascal.

PASCAL. That shows all you know about me. Eh, Burmeister?

BURMEISTER. Tell us, Dr. Mallaby—I'm not a doctor, but I am interested in these matters—isn't it difficult to conceive of a further advance in the treatment of tuberculosis if we accept Tarantanov's Proposition? I speak as a layman, of course, but isn't it—how shall I put it?

SIR ANTHONY (*aside to* PASCAL). Did you ever hear the like of that? He never heard of Tarantanov till five minutes ago.

PASCAL. Shut up, Toad! Ikey knows his business.

MALLABY. Well, you see, the point is this. I agree with you absolutely. I may be heretical, but I don't care. It is rather remarkable, but you seem to have got hold of the crucial point. My feeling is—I may be wrong, you know—but my feeling is that if Tarantanov hadn't written in Russian we should have seen through him long ago. You see, a very big and easily explicable factor in the entire complex set of circumstances can be reduced to a simple postulate in terms of electro-dynamics. (*The gong sounds for breakfast.*) Don't you see if you approach the problem from this angle . . . Take it that we know—as every schoolboy—every journalist—knows the specific ionic activity of the tubercle bacillus *and*

its lipoids, *and* what I may call for the sake of clarity, although it's a villainous word—like "occupy"—its environment. If you use a solvent with a dielectric constant of round about fourteen—say salicylic aldehyde, if you like—always remembering, of course, that we have a wider margin and consequently a lower adsorption unit. Well, then, in these conditions, you can readily understand . . . or can't you, by the way? I'm trying not to be too technical.

BURMEISTER. Go on. Go on. I follow you absolutely.

MRS. MALLABY. I strongly advise you to follow Lord Pascal and me, Mr. Burmeister. We are going to have breakfast.

BURMEISTER. Ah! Splendid! Doctor, we must obey Her-Who-Must-be-Obeyed, must we not?

MALLABY. Just a minute. Just a minute.

MRS. MALLABY. George, Mr. Burmeister will die of starvation complicated by boredom, and you will have to sign his certificate, and it will be a *scandal*. Come at once.

BURMEISTER. Madam, will you permit me? Your other arm. I was so absorbed that I forgot my manners.

[PASCAL, MRS. MALLABY *and* BURMEISTER *go through the door to the breakfast-room.*

MALLABY. Mr. What's-his-name appears to be a very intelligent chap, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. He is. Extremely intelligent.

[*They follow. A pause. Bell rings. It rings again. Enter* MAIDSERVANT *through the breakfast-room door. She goes to the passage and reappears admitting a country-woman,* MRS. ANDERSON.

MAID. The doctor's at his breakfast, Mrs. Anderson.

MRS. ANDERSON. Well, tell him he's to come at once.

MAID. Is it important?

MRS. ANDERSON. Would you see me here at this time of the morning if it was not important?

MAID. Is it Mr. Anderson or Willie?

MRS. ANDERSON. Mind your own business, and tell the doctor to come at once.

MAID. I'll tell him to call round.

MRS. ANDERSON. You'll tell him to come to me this minute. How is he to know what he's to come for if I don't tell him? He can be thinking over the case on his way.

MAID. Will you no' leave a message?

MRS. ANDERSON. I'll do nothing of the sort, leave a message —and have it the talk of the town. [*Bell rings.*

MAID. Excuse me one moment. (*She admits* JUKES, LORD PASCAL'S *driver.*) You'll excuse me showing you into the surgery. They're all at breakfast in the dining-room. The doctor'll be here in a minute. Was you from the big house?

JUKES. No. I'm Lord Pascal's chauffeur. Is his Lordship still here, Miss, can you tell me?

MAID. There's three gentlemen here for breakfast. A grey-headed nippity one and a big red-faced one and a fat Eyetalian-looking one. Would one of these be his Lordship?

JUKES. Lord Pascal is a tall gentleman with a rich complexion.

MAID. That's him. I'll tell him you're here. [*Exit.*

MRS. ANDERSON. See you don't forget about me! Lords, no less. (*Drops her voice to a whisper.*) I see, you'll be noticing a gey droll smell to be in a doctor's house at seven in the morning. It's whisky. You can take it from me, and don't let it go any further, for I'm not one to be free in my talk with strangers. The doctor drinks.

JUKES. Dear me. Bless my soul.

MRS. ANDERSON. You never said a truer word in your life. A clever fellow too. It's the drunken doctors that are aye the cleverest. He saved my Willie's life. Him that had galloping consumption. We tried everything. Dandelion tea. Poultices. All the cures. Hold your tongue, he was near away with it till Dr. Mallaby came round. Skin and bone he was. He's cured now, but delicate. He's a clever one, Mallaby. But wheesht and I'll tell you. Every night long after decent folks are bedded his light burns on, and it's nip, nip, nip at the bottle all the night through. I'm real sorry for his wife, though she's a flighty, feckless body, and no better than she

should be, if all accounts are true. They tell me she was a London lady before she catched the doctor . . .

Enter MALLABY. *He looks back speaking.*

MALLABY. No, no, no! Colloidal—not celluloidal. Nothing to do with celluloid. Colloidal. (*Shuts door.*) Well, Mrs. Anderson? Well, well, well, well. What is it?

MRS. ANDERSON. It's a fine morning after the fog, doctor. I just thought I would pop in and catch you before you started your rounds to tell you that Willie is badly again. He was late of getting to bed last night. We had a wee bit party and lassies dancing to the gramophone. And so on. Young folk. Just young folk. So he's not just the thing this morning, poor lad, and him not awful strong.

MALLABY. Strong? He's lazy. Bone lazy. He should have been at work six months ago. His chest is quite well. Tell him to come round to me.

MRS. ANDERSON. But the poor lad is that exhausted like. He didna' feel up to coming to see you, and he just said . . .

MALLABY. I'll be here till midday. He's as strong as a horse. He must come to see *me*. (*To* JUKES.) Well?

JUKES. Lord Pascal's chauffeur, sir. They say down at the garage they *think* they'll have the car ready by the afternoon. *I know* they will. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling his Lordship I'll see that it's ready in less time than it would take to get another suitable conveyance.

MALLABY. That's all right. That's all right. I expect Lord Pascal will lunch here.

JUKES. Very good, sir. I'll just step down to the garage again, sir.

MALLABY. I say, are you all right for breakfast?

JUKES. If you were in Lord Pascal's employ, sir, you wouldn't have any appetite till your job was done. Good morning, sir. [*Exit.*

MALLABY. You still here, Mrs. Anderson?

MRS. ANDERSON. I thought you might take a look at the boy, doctor, while you was passing on your rounds, like. You see, he's not awful strong.

MALLABY. He is. Awful strong. Clear out, Mrs. Anderson. I must have my breakfast.

MRS. ANDERSON. If it's the matter of your account, we fully intended to let you have your money last month, but what with one thing and another . . .

MALLABY. It's nothing to do with my account. Tell your good-for-nothing lout of a son to put his legs over the side of the bed and he'll feel all right.

MRS. ANDERSON. Well, it's on your responsibility, doctor. On your head be it.

[*Exit. Laughter heard from the breakfast-room as* MALLABY *opens the door.*

MALLABY. Mr. Burmeister! As I say, the difficulty was to get a true colloidal suspension . . . [*He goes out, leaving the stage empty.* MALLABY *re-enters.*

(*Talking partly to himself.*) Just a scrap of paper and I'll show you. The difficulty is—the difficulty is to get—to get a true colloidal susp . . . Now, where the devil is my scrap paper? [*He fumbles in his desk.*

CURTAIN.

[*After a short interval the* CURTAIN RISES *on* SCENE II.

SCENE II.

The same. Later in the morning. MRS. ANDERSON, MALLABY *and* WILLIE, *an oaf of nineteen, who is stripped to the waist and sulking at* MALLABY, *who is prodding him with a stethoscope. As the curtain rises,* WILLIE *is heard speaking.*

WILLIE. One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three.

MALLABY. That'll do.

WILLIE. One, two, three.

MALLABY. I said that would do. Breathe, now . . .

Don't hold your breath, breathe . . . and don't breathe like a broken-winded grampus. Ordinary breaths. . . . Oh! In the name of the Seven Suffering Sadducees, are those ordinary breaths? . . . That's better. Now whisper "One, two, three."

WILLIE (*in a stentorian bellow*). One, two, three!

MALLABY. I didn't tell you to howl. I said, whisper. Like this. . . . "Onetwothree."

WILLIE. One, two, three.

MALLABY. Oh, dear! Mrs. Anderson, why did you fall in love with Mr. Anderson?

MRS. ANDERSON. Of course, as you may say, it's difficult to say in a thing the like of that, Doctor . . .

MALLABY. Be quiet, please. Now—"One, two, three."

MRS. ANDERSON. One, two, three.

MALLABY. Not you, Mrs. Anderson. Willie.

WILLIE. [I cannae, Doctor.]

MALLABY. Can't what?

WILLIE. Whisper.

MALLABY. Try, like a good boy.

WILLIE. One, two, three.

MALLABY. Again.

WILLIE. One, two, three.

MALLABY. That's better. That'll do.

WILLIE. Can I put on my shirt now?

MALLABY. How do I know? There seem to be darned few things you can do. I've finished.

MRS. ANDERSON. How is he, Doctor? Get on your shirt, my pet lamb.

MALLABY. He's as sound as a bell and as strong as a buffalo.

MRS. ANDERSON. But has he not got one of his lungs touched? His Uncle Mattha died of consumption.

MALLABY. I have explained to you that he has had tuberculosis of the lungs and is now well. Completely well. I have explained this to you ten times. The proper treatment for his present complaint is a job of work.

MRS. ANDERSON. Now, Doctor, you're joking. He is not near strong enough for that. Do you feel strong enough, Willie?

WILLIE. No.

MRS. ANDERSON. I'm always afraid he'll catch cold.

[*Enter* SIR ANTHONY *and* MR. BURMEISTER.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought Pascal was here.

MALLABY. Don't go. Don't go. I wish you would look at this chap's chest, if you are at all interested.

SIR ANTHONY. It is ages since I touched a stethoscope. Have you . . .?

MALLABY. Stop a bit. X-ray films. Yes, yes, yes. I'll get them in a moment. Oh, yes. Here they are. Come over to the window. He has them done in Edinburgh every three months. This was taken a year ago. [*They look at the films.*

BURMEISTER. So the doctor cured you, eh?

WILLIE. Aye.

MRS. ANDERSON. Yes, sir, galloping consumption. Fair roasting with the fever, and lashings of sweat boiling out of him and eyes like chuckies, and ribs like girds on a barrel, and spitting blood, too. Just a year ago, the doctor saw him the first. I said to my man, "Willie's away with it. Away you go to the doctor, quick, quick!" I wasn't going to bury a son of mine without calling in a doctor first. It's more decent like. So the doctor he came, and he saw what was wrong at oncet, and he give Willie a jag with a wee needle and a bottle and then more jags . . .

MALLABY. Please be quiet, Mrs. Anderson.

SIR ANTHONY. These films are certainly very remarkable.

MALLABY. Yes, aren't they? I've several more of different patients. Of course, you can't judge from a plate alone, but . . . [*He rummages for more films. Enter* MAID.

MAID. Please, Doctor, Miss Dinah has fell off a ladder in the kitchen garden, and you've to come at once.

MALLABY. Oh, my Lord! Excuse me, Sir Anthony. (*Runs out after* MAID.)

MRS. ANDERSON. Are you ready, Willie? Well, good morning, gentlemen. Thank God for Dr. Mallaby, I say. That's Mrs. Mallaby's aunt what has fell, gentlemen. A fine old lady, but a bit daft, they say. It's in the family. Come away, Willie. [*Exeunt* MRS. ANDERSON *and* WILLIE.

BURMEISTER. Well?

SIR ANTHONY (*looking at films held against the light*). Rather extraordinary. I don't pretend to know much about such things, but if one can judge by radiograms, his results are astonishing.

BURMEISTER. That stuff he was telling me at breakfast; was it all right?

SIR ANTHONY. I thought you understood it.

BURMEISTER. I? Not a word. But I spend half my life listening to experts as if I understood. I ought to be good at it. I've served on seven Royal Commissions, simply because I look an intelligent listener. But tell me. What was it all about?

SIR ANTHONY. Well, I can't say that I was very clear myself as to the drift of his jargon. I am a surgeon, you see. A plain man of my hands. But if there had been anything in it, the journals and the societies would have taken it up. You can bet your boots on that.

BURMEISTER. I never bet. And if I did I'd bet on something safe—something predicable—like a racehorse. Not on a Medical Society. Why can't you give me a judgment on the evidence of your senses?

SIR ANTHONY. Forty years of practice have taught me that the evidence of my senses is not worth—that! Where is Pascal?

BURMEISTER. Where do you expect him to be?

SIR ANTHONY. In a telegraph office?

BURMEISTER. No. With a girl. Madame Doctor is showing him the Devil's Leap by daylight. . . . I do not myself despair of leading her to a devil's leap by more appropriate lighting. Do you know these translucent tables at Navette's?

SIR ANTHONY. No, I do not. And I dislike you very much indeed.

BURMEISTER. Do you really? Do you know, if I were not myself, I should rather like myself.

[*Enter* MRS. MALLABY *and* PASCAL, *flushed and full of chatter.*

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, there you are! We've been looking for you everywhere. I wanted you all to see our showplace: the Devil's Leap. An enormous jump for such an old gentleman. Don't you think so, Lord Pascal?

PASCAL. Ask Burmeister. The old boy is a customer of his. Bought his soul years ago.

BURMEISTER. Don't believe him, Mrs. Mallaby. He doesn't believe there is such a thing as a soul.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, but there is, there is! Isn't there, Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. I can only say that I have never . . .

BURMEISTER. "Encountered it at a pathological examination"? Put a penny in the slot and the figure talks. "And would not trust your senses if you did." Don't ask him, Mrs. Mallaby. Do you know what he said to me just now? That he didn't trust his senses.

MRS. MALLABY. How modest of him!

BURMEISTER. I always trust my senses. There are more than five. They lead me on wild, hopeless enterprises. But it is always worth while.

MRS. MALLABY. Yes. And I often . . . By the way, where is that depressing husband of mine?

SIR ANTHONY. He has just dashed off to the assistance of a Miss Dinah, who is said to have fallen off a ladder in the kitchen garden.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, dear! That is Aunt Dinah! What *was* she doing up a ladder? She lives with us, you know. She isn't really our aunt, but a very dear old friend. She is not very reliable. She is very old, you know. I must go and see if I can do anything. I do hope she isn't hurt.

BURMEISTER. Can I—can we——?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, no, no. It's nothing, probably. But I had better . . . [*Exit.*

PASCAL (*yawns and looks at his watch*). Half-past twelve. What time is lunch?

BURMEISTER. You ought to know, you have spent all morning with the Lady of the House. I can hardly believe that lunch didn't crop up in the conversation.

PASCAL. No. I was so interested I forgot to ask. Ikey, I think there is something in all this. Rather romantic, the whole business. Here's this absolutely delightful girl carried off her feet by admiration for a shy, retiring genius; brought up here and absolutely buried. Toady's colleagues won't give him a show, and he's too proud and sensitive to push himself forward. And here she is, wasting her youth in this abomination of desolation. "Full many a thing-um-bob is born to blush unseen and waste its what-you-may-call-it on the desert air." Very sad, when you think of it.

BURMEISTER. I don't suppose one can do anything.

PASCAL. Well, as a matter of fact, I have practically promised Mrs. Mallaby to move in the matter. I'm rather a soft-headed chump, as you know, Ikey, and the thought of that poor little girl dying for want of freedom and life and air . . . Besides, there is a *stunt* in it. What do you think? Eh?

BURMEISTER. Hush! We are observed!

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, don't mind me! If Mallaby is the man I take him for, the first thing he'll do when he finds out what you two are after, will be to kick you over one of his precipices. These little, mild, cranky men are fiends if you make them angry. "The wrath of the sheep is terrible."

PASCAL (*bullying*). What do you mean, "when he finds out what we're after"?

SIR ANTHONY. You're after his livelihood and his professional honour and his immortal soul. I say nothing of his domestic happiness.

PASCAL. There are times, Craye, when you are downright offensive. Anyhow, as you won't help us, it is none of your damned business.

SIR ANTHONY. I'm President of the Royal Academy of Medicine and Surgery. It may be my damned business some day.

PASCAL. You tut-tutting old Torquemada! You're prepared to sit there and say that you'll break this poor devil for benefiting the human race?

SIR ANTHONY. If he betrays his profession to its enemies, I will break him. (*Silence.*)

PASCAL. Look here, Toady, you know that your profession has no more sincere admirer than I am.

SIR ANTHONY. Your admiration is as ignorant as your spite, and as worthless. I suppose you call yourself Public Opinion. Well, Public Opinion has stoned the prophets, crucified the saints and bowed down to idols. Whenever Medicine has struggled out of the Dark Ages up to the frontiers of Death itself, there has never lacked a horde of barbarians to drive it back again into the darkness. You barbarian, your superstitious homage is nothing to us. We know it for what it is.

PASCAL. Listen to that! A barbarian! Well, my Heavens! I'm a D.C.L. of Oxford and Durham and an LL.D. of St. Andrews. I'm . . . A barbarian! Damn it, I'm civilisation!

BURMEISTER. It is a characteristic of civilised man to lose his temper over words. You and Toady are both highly civilised.

[*Enter* AUNT DINAH. *She is incredibly old, but as active as a ferret.*

AUNT DINAH. Good morning, fine gentlemen.

PASCAL. Good morning, ma'am.

AUNT DINAH. I've just been tacking up a branch of the plum tree and I fell off the ladder. I've given them the slip again. They can't kill me. Fiddle-de-dee. Doctors and all of them.

BURMEISTER. We were very concerned to hear of your accident. Wouldn't it be better if you lie down for a little?

AUNT DINAH. It depends on what you call a little or a jot or a tittle. They'd like to see me tucked away in my cosy coffin

till the Resurrection. I suppose you call that a little? Ho! Very likely. What are you doing here, all of you! Patients?

SIR ANTHONY. Perhaps we had better introduce ourselves. This is Lord Pascal——

AUNT DINAH. No. You are too well dressed to be patients. You'll be running after Dolly Mallaby, I expect. She's prettier even than I was at her age. But no brains. Not enough brains to come in when it rains. Foll-the-diddle, foll-the-dee. You, sir, you have the big jaw and slack mouth that Teddy Hollybush's boy had, and he ended his days on the gallows.

PASCAL. I hope for better luck than that.

AUNT DINAH. Many a smart one has ended on the gallows. Here they come. Off I go.

[*Exit into breakfast-room.* DR. *and* MRS. MALLABY *and the* MAID *enter by the front door passage.*

MRS. MALLABY. Have you seen Aunt Dinah?

BURMEISTER. An old lady? She has gone into the breakfast-room.

MRS. MALLABY. Damn! George, you catch her. I'm all out of breath. [*Exeunt* MALLABY *and the* MAID.

Isn't she dreadful? But George is so kind-hearted, he won't have her sent away. What did she say to you?

BURMEISTER. We had quite an interesting little chat. An original old lady.

MRS. MALLABY. Lord Pascal. While we have a minute. Did you speak to Sir Anthony and Mr. Burmeister?

PASCAL. Yes, I did. I don't know what Burmeister feels about it, but Sir Anthony—— Well, we can't get him to see reason. Whenever I advance a proposition he turns on me and makes a public speech.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, Sir Anthony! Don't you . . . don't you think there is anything in George's ideas?

SIR ANTHONY. I haven't had sufficient opportunity of judging, Mrs. Mallaby. However, if he will let me have some notes put together in some sort of sequence, I shall take

them up to Town and ask one of my medical colleagues to go into the matter.

PASCAL. !!!!

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, that *is* good of you, Sir Anthony. But I thought—I thought anyone could see that it is a marvellous cure. Don't you think there is no time to be lost? Thousands of people are suffering and dying. Lord Pascal said that the—that the Laboratory and the Dispensary should be put in hand at once and the Public should be informed and appeals started and so on.

SIR ANTHONY. I disagree entirely with Lord Pascal. It is my duty to tell you that your husband will be taking grave risks if he acts on Lord Pascal's advice in this or in any other matter.

MRS. MALLABY. But you can't do anything without taking risks. And he's tried for so long to get recognition from the doctors. His heart is almost broken. He should have been a great consultant long ago instead of a poor little struggling country doctor in this—this beastly place.

SIR ANTHONY. He probably didn't go about things in the right way.

MRS. MALLABY. What *is* the right way? He has no one to tell him. And all this morning you have sat still and sneered, yes, sneered, and let him and Lord Pascal and Mr. Burmeister talk, and not said a word to help him or advise him. It's just "Try not the pass, the old man said," without a hint of another way round. We are sick to death of waiting and waiting and working and trying and waiting again, and being snubbed and having all the life and hope and energy crushed out of us. Lord Pascal is quite right. You doctors do not want people to get better.

SIR ANTHONY. My dear Mrs. Mallaby, I can't argue with you. I have told you I will do all I can.

MRS. MALLABY. So have dozens of solemn men with knighthoods and strings of letters after their names. And they do nothing. Nothing! Oh, damn you all! (*She breaks down.*)

PASCAL. This has gone far enough, Mrs. Mallaby. If you

can persuade your husband to come up to London to-morrow, I shall make it my personal business to see that he gets justice, in spite of their teeth. I have never failed yet. Are you with me, Burmeister?

BURMEISTER. I am with you. You mustn't mind Sir Anthony, Mrs. Mallaby. He means well, I've no doubt. There now, there now. You mustn't cry. What will your husband think? [*Enter* MALLABY.

MALLABY. What's the matter?

PASCAL. Your wife is taking Sir Anthony Craye too seriously. He is a very old friend of mine, but I'm bound to say he has curious ideas of how to conduct himself towards his hostess.

MALLABY. ? ?

SIR ANTHONY. I don't quite gather what the trouble is all about, Mallaby. We all seem to have got excited about nothing. Personally I propose going for a little walk.

[MALLABY *confronts him, his eyes blazing.*

MALLABY. You've made my wife cry. How did you make my wife cry?

SIR ANTHONY. My dear fellow!

MALLABY. I'm not your dear fellow. Come along, out with it. I've thought you a humbug for a long time, but nobody told me you weren't a gentleman.

MRS. MALLABY. Please, George. It's all right, dearest, really and truly.

MALLABY. It is *not* all right. Does he think I'm afraid of him because he is Lord High Pimp of Harley Street? What is it, you infernal, incompetent plumber? What did you say, you damned old cad?

SIR ANTHONY. Look here, Dr. Mallaby, you forget yourself. Take your hand off my coat, sir. Ah! I wish you a very good morning.

[*He goes to the passage where his coat and wraps are hung, puts them on without assistance, and goes out like Coriolanus or somebody.*

MALLABY. I—I don't know. I beg your pardon, gentle-

men. I am a little quick-tempered. Dear me, what a dreadful scene! I'm sorry, dear. I'm frightfully sorry.

BURMEISTER. Sit down, Mr. Mallaby. Sit down, sir. It was all a misunderstanding. It can easily be put right. It was Craye's fault entirely. He is so tactless.

MALLABY. My head is in a muddle. It's the want of sleep, I think. I've had no sleep for something like forty hours, you know. My Lord, how awful!

BURMEISTER. We got into a little argument, you see. And you know Sir Anthony's bluff ways. He is so used to laying down the law. Mrs. Mallaby was not accustomed to him, and she was a little upset over Miss Dinah's accident, and quite a little quarrel flared up about nothing. But Pascal and I will put it all right with Craye. We are three lifelong friends. We'll make quite sure that he isn't your enemy because of this.

MALLABY. I don't give a damn whether he is my enemy or not. But I object to losing my temper.

MRS. MALLABY. Do go upstairs and go to bed, George. You're terribly overwrought.

MALLABY. Dorothy, I won't be ordered about. Even by you.

MRS. MALLABY. Please, George. To please me.

MALLABY. No, no, dear. Don't ask me to. I'm better now. I don't suppose it's any use running after him. He'll go down to the hotel. I can't tell you how sorry I am, gentlemen, but he had no right to behave as he did.

PASCAL. You're perfectly right. It was quite inexcusable.

BURMEISTER. He's a friend of mine, but I can't help feeling with Pascal. To be perfectly frank, I never saw anything so boorish in my life. I should have lost my temper myself.

PASCAL. If I had been in your position, I doubt if I could have kept my hands off him.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, it wasn't so bad as that.

PASCAL. Yes, it was. Three complete strangers barge in here in the middle of the night, quarter themselves on you for half a day, and one of them can't behave with ordinary civility. I think a written apology is called for, if you ask me.

MALLABY. Oh, *that's* no good. Don't let's talk about it any more.

BURMEISTER. No. Perhaps we had better not. All the same—— No.

MRS. MALLABY. What were you going to say, Mr. Burmeister?

BURMEISTER. Oh, nothing. Another time.

MRS. MALLABY. Please, please don't be oracular. I've gone through enough already to-day. I shall scream if you are oracular.

BURMEISTER. If you must have it, I can't get rid of the thought that this little incident will make things rather blue for your great discovery. Craye is a fine fellow, but he is apt to be vindictive.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, surely, surely he couldn't be so petty!

PASCAL. The bigger the man is the smaller he is, Mrs. Mallaby.

MRS. MALLABY. But the discovery belongs to the world.

BURMEISTER. Many prophets have died before the people heard their message; and all because they wouldn't speak politely to princes.

MRS. MALLABY. It's terrible. It's shameful.

MALLABY. He can't destroy my work.

PASCAL. He will do his best. I know Craye. He'll down you if he can.

MALLABY. I'm not the sort of man to be downed, as he'll damned soon find out.

BURMEISTER. You must remember you are up against a very powerful close corporation. And a fighting corporation.

MALLABY. I'll fight, then. If it comes to fighting I'll be no craven.

BURMEISTER. It will be a big job.

MALLABY. Not such a big job as upsetting Tarantanov's Theorem.

BURMEISTER. Yes. But *have* you upset it?

MALLABY. Of course, I told you. Don't you remember what I said at breakfast?

BURMEISTER. Yes, yes. But who knows? Does Tarantanov know? Do the Universities and the Colleges and the Faculties know?

MALLABY. No, they don't. But they shall.

BURMEISTER. Not if the Royal Academy of Medicine can stop you.

MALLABY. Yes. If the Royal Academy of Medicine and all the cohorts of Hell try to stop me. I'm the most original worker since Pasteur. They can't keep me down.

BURMEISTER. But medical etiquette——

MALLABY. Curse medical etiquette! Don't you see that this is a big thing? One of the biggest things that ever happened. Do you think I don't know it?

BURMEISTER. If you are sure of that you must fight.

MALLABY. I'll fight till I die.

PASCAL. Then don't rant like a duellist in an Opera. See here. Don't talk about dying. You'll fight till you win. I'll help you, and this sort of scrapping is my job. And it won't be the first war Burmeister has financed. Let me have your papers. We'll pack them in the Rolls, and they will be in London to-night. Give me your papers.

MALLABY. Yes, yes. Take what you like. Do what you like. I'll come up myself to-morrow and raise Cain all over the shop. I've had about enough of lying low. Wait a minute.

MRS. MALLABY. George, what are you going to do? (*He goes to the telephone.*)

MALLABY. Hello! St. Bridget's 27. Hello! Yes. Hello! Is that Dr. Armistead's? Is that you, Armistead? Armistead, I'm g-going to London to-morrow for a week or maybe more.

MRS. MALLABY. You'll want your suitcase packed. [*Exit.*

MALLABY. Will you carry on? Yes, yes. I can't help that. No, there's not much doing. Yes, only one—she's as strong as a horse. Yes. I'll leave you a note of the calls. Thanks very much, old boy. Yes, please. Quite well, thanks. No, no. That will be all right, then. It's most awfully good of you. Good-bye. [*Enter* AUNT DINAH.

MALLABY. Oh, Lord! You here again? Well, Aunt. All right now?

AUNT DINAH. Yes. No thanks to you, George. Where is the grey-haired man who looks like a head-waiter?

MALLABY. Oh, Sir Anthony? He's gone to the hotel.

AUNT DINAH. Why didn't he say good-bye to me?

MALLABY. He told me to apologise for him to you.

AUNT DINAH. You liar. He was the only decent one, though. Those two are rascals.

MALLABY. Tut, tut. No, no.

AUNT DINAH. Don't you think I know a rascal when I see one?

MALLABY. You make mistakes sometimes. All of us do. May I introduce Lord Pascal? My aunt, Miss Bullfinch.

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Lord Rascal. I told you so. I don't think I want to know the other one at all. He reminds me somehow of the word "Bucket Shop." Do you sell buckets, Mister?

BURMEISTER. No. Oh, no. No, no, no.

AUNT DINAH. Well, I hope you are honest. Going to London, George?

MALLABY. Er—yes. Yes. For a day or two. How did you know?

AUNT DINAH. Aha! Aha! said she. I was listening at the keyhole of the door (Oh, Lor!) when you telephoned that quack Armistead. I am coming too. Toolooraloo.

MALLABY. No, no. You will stay at home and look after Dorothy.

AUNT DINAH. Armistead can look after Dorothy. I'm coming, I'm coming, and my head is bending low. My trunk is packed. It is always packed, though I haven't had a jaunt for years. I was presented in 1856, gentlemen. I know London very well.

MALLABY. Listen, Aunt Dinah, you—can't—come—to London.

AUNT DINAH. Ha! You thought I couldn't go up that ladder. But I could. Oh, the ladies of London so rare and so fair, they have gold on their fingers and gold in their hair;

and, though with my Susan they cannot compare, there are times in my dreams that I wish I was there. (*She skips out.*)

MRS. MALLABY. That settles it, I suppose. The Brigade of Guards couldn't stop her now. And I must go too, to look after her.

MALLABY. I suppose so. Yes. (*Bell rings.*)

MRS. MALLABY. I wonder if that's Sir Anthony.

[*Runs to the door. It admits* JUKES, *the chauffeur.*

JUKES. Lord Pascal in, Madam?

PASCAL. Here I am, Jukes. Come in.

JUKES. Car's all right now, m'Lord.

PASCAL. You've been a devil of a time about it, haven't you? Let's have a look at it. Come along, Ikey. (*Goes out.*)

BURMEISTER. Did you see Sir Anthony on the road, Jukes?

JUKES. Yes, sir. Going to the hotel, sir. Says we can pick him up there after luncheon.

[BURMEISTER *and* JUKES *go out.*

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, George, you've done it now!

MALLABY. Yes, yes. Perhaps I have. I say, Dorothy, what big, nice, greedy, direct, fine, simple successful chaps, these chaps are. Aren't they? Yes. Somehow, I can't help feeling as if the lions had come to Daniel's den.

MRS. MALLABY. But you're going through with it?

MALLABY. Yes. I'm going through with it. (*He goes to his desk and begins to arrange his papers in a heap. He is like to a man in a dream.*)

MRS. MALLABY. George, we've been rather happy here, haven't we?

MALLABY. Eh? Oh, yes.

MRS. MALLABY. Won't you be sorry to leave this little room and the hollyhocks and the hills?

MALLABY. Yes, I suppose I shall.

MRS. MALLABY. Don't you think perhaps it's rather a daring step?

MALLABY. Eh? What is?

MRS. MALLABY. You will be flying in the face of the Academy of Medicine.

MALLABY. The Academy of Medicine and the Star Chamber and the Conference of the Allied Powers and the President of the Trades Union Congress will not prevent my going to London if I want to.

MRS. MALLABY. It's not just the going to London. Do you think you can trust Lord Pascal and Mr. Burmeister?

MALLABY. I shall trust nobody but myself. I'm committed to nobody.

MRS. MALLABY. I know. But isn't there something in your rules about being mixed up with the newspapers? I mean they are awfully strict with it, aren't they?

MALLABY. They are strict about everything they can play the little parochial Bumble about. I don't give two hoots for the Academy of Medicine. They've done nothing for me, and I don't know why I should consider them.

MRS. MALLABY. But, George, they can ruin you.

MALLABY. No, they can't. And if they could kill me, I'd mark them before I died. You saw how that swine Craye behaved? An ignorant, ill-bred, pompous swine. He's typical of them, by George. I'm a better man than the whole pack.

MRS. MALLABY. But listen, George. You were always angry at doctors who got their names into the Press. How will you feel when the headlines come out?

MALLABY. There won't be any headlines, and if there are, I'll write them. I'll—I'll insist. I'm not an easy man to drive.

MRS. MALLABY. Lord Pascal's awfully clever.

MALLABY. Clever! He's one of those blustering asses who buffet their way to the front through sheer insensibility. And Burmeister has no character. I'll use both of them. Damn it, Dorothy, any man of common intelligence can twist those big business men round his little finger if he takes the necessary trouble. I need their help. I'm out to establish my life's work, my child. They shall do as I tell them. How long did it take me to talk Burmeister over this morning? Dorothy, if I had any time for such folly I could be a millionaire in a year.

MRS. MALLABY. I know. You're wonderful. But do be careful. [*Re-enter* PASCAL *and* BURMEISTER.

PASCAL. The car is ready. Have you got the papers?

MALLABY. They'll take a bit of sorting out, but we could make two or three parcels, and I could put most of the stuff from the file cabinet in a bag.

PASCAL. Right. Bring the whole show along. Now look here, we can't take your whole household in the Rolls. We'll take Mrs. Mallaby now if she throws together some things and beats the Ladies' Record for Leaving Home. You put the documentary evidence in a heap, and my friend Dr. Lapthorne will put it in order as soon as it gets to town. Burmeister and you can bring it up by the 2.45, and I'll wire Lapthorne to meet you. You can also bring all Mrs. Mallaby's dresses and things, which the maid will pack. Sorry we've no room in the Rolls, but I don't expect you'd want to travel with Craye anyhow. Run, Mrs. Mallaby, and get ready. And do hurry. There is no time to lose.

MRS. MALLABY. Lord Pascal, I couldn't possibly . . .

PASCAL. You can do anything you like if you try hard enough. Be quick.

MRS. MALLABY. But you will have to give me a little time . . .

PASCAL. I'll give you two minutes. I know a woman can't go round to post a letter without making preparations enough for a polar expedition, but you must break the laws of nature in this instance. Hurry. (*She goes, overwhelmed by the torrent of words.*) Ikey, see that Dr. Mallaby loses no time. We'll have supper at the Carlton to-night at ten o'clock. Never mind about wires. I'll stop at a telegraph office on the way. I think we shall beat the train, but if we don't Lapthorne and Briggs will do what is necessary. Where are my wraps? Jukes? [*Enter* JUKES.

Put on my wraps. I think that's about all. Bring every scrap of paper you've got. You'll require to get a move on, Mallaby, if you're to catch that train. Burmeister will help you. MRS. MALLABY! ARE YOU READY?

MRS. MALLABY (*faintly from above*). Oh, *do* wait a minute. And please be quiet.

PASCAL. I can't wait a moment longer. Are you coming or are you not? [*Enter* MRS. MALLABY.

MRS. MALLABY. Quick, quick. Aunt Dinah is all dressed and ready and she heard you, and she's coming! (THEY *run out.*)

BURMEISTER. Miracle upon miracles!

MALLABY. I say. I mean. I mean to say. What?

[*Enter* AUNT DINAH *with the* MAID *lugging a large hair trunk.* JUKES *has returned to the little vestibule for an attache case.*

AUNT DINAH. Stop a bit. Hi, you engineman, come here and help with this trunk.

MALLABY. You can't possibly, Aunt Dinah . . .

JUKES. What is it, madam? Lord Pascal is impatient to be off.

AUNT DINAH. Take that trunk.

JUKES. I don't know, ma'am, whether . . .

AUNT DINAH. Take that trunk!

JUKES. Well, ma'am. (*Looks helplessly at* BURMEISTER, *who makes no sign.* JUKES *shoulders the trunk and exit followed by* AUNT DINAH *and the* MAID.)

BURMEISTER. That is one of the most remarkable old ladies. . . . Do you think he'll take her?

MALLABY. I think he will. (*They go to the window.*)

BURMEISTER. She's taking a risk. Pascal is quite capable of assault.

MALLABY. Nobody is capable of assaulting Aunt Dinah. Yes. Yes, I thought so. She has got in beside the driver.

BURMEISTER. I never saw Pascal in such a rage.

MALLABY. He can rage himself into a fit, it will make no difference to Aunt Dinah. Incidentally she will make that driver drive as he has never driven before. She has cost me fifty guineas in fines.

BURMEISTER. They're off!

MALLABY. Yes. Well, I suppose I have crossed the Rubicon.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

Morning in a private sitting-room at a moderately good London hotel. The room is littered with newspapers. MRS. MALLABY *is sitting on a Chesterfield reading one of the newspapers and biting her handkerchief to indicate conflicting emotions. The telephone bell rings. She answers it.*

MRS. MALLABY. Hello! Yes. Yes, yes. This is Mrs. Mallaby. Mr. who? Oh, yes. Ask him to come up.

[*When she has had time to make herself more attractive against his arrival,* MR. BURMEISTER *comes up.*

BURMEISTER. Good morning, Mrs. Mallaby.

MRS. MALLABY. You *are* an early bird, Mr. Burmeister. I've just had breakfast. George is not up yet. The poor dear is absolutely all out.

BURMEISTER. I wanted to see you. (*He has not relinquished her hand and guides her to the couch beside him.*) Do you like London better than the dark unfathomed caves?

MRS. MALLABY. I've seen so little of it. I haven't been in London since I was a little girl. And there was the supper-party the night we arrived, and I was in bed all yesterday, and there was Lord Pascal's dinner-party last night. My impression of London is all Pol Roger and bed-clothes.

BURMEISTER. You must let me show you London this afternoon. Quietly. And we shall dine quietly to-night at a quiet place, and dance perhaps three dances, and then you will let me know what you think of this great city. It shall stand or fall by your opinion.

MRS. MALLABY. That will be splendid, Mr. Burmeister; but I am anxious about George. He . . .

BURMEISTER. Lord Pascal and Dr. Lapthorne will keep

George extremely busy for the next few days. He will be in no mood for such gentle gaiety as we intend.

MRS. MALLABY. I don't mean that, of course. I mean—I don't know what I mean. But have you seen the papers?

BURMEISTER. No. Not Pascal's papers. I find them a little boisterous. But you may trust Pascal. He will let people know, all right.

MRS. MALLABY. I don't think George will like this. (*Picks up a paper.*)

BURMEISTER. Let me see. (*Fixes an eyeglass.*) "War on the White Plague. First Shot Fired. Who is Doctor Mallaby?" Um. Yes. And the other? "Fair Play. Mallaby *versus* the Tubercle Bacillus. The *Meteor* keeps the Ring." Well?

MRS. MALLABY. You see, I don't quite think this is what George expected. I mean, don't you think it's hardly dispassionate and gentlemanly and professional and scientific enough? We all like seeing our names in print, but I don't think George will like quite such heavy print.

BURMEISTER. My dear, you must leave such things to experts. Your husband has the goods, but he is no salesman. Pascal is one of the finest salesmen in the world.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, do you think so? I think Lord Pascal is so honest and straight. I think he must have risen to be a great man through a sort of grand simplicity.

BURMEISTER. Not his own simplicity, my dear.

MRS. MALLABY. Now you are trying to be funny, and that is not friendly to your friend. I don't think you clever business men can appreciate a big child-like mind like Lord Pascal's.

BURMEISTER. Yes, he has that. He will always be a big boy. Do you like him, Mrs. Mallaby?

MRS. MALLABY. Of course. Enormously. I never met a really great man before. Being with him is like climbing a mountain. And one does get blown about so!

BURMEISTER. Don't you think you would rather have the rich, sheltered, sunny valleys and the deep, slow rivers that seem half asleep?

MRS. MALLABY. I think I should.

BURMEISTER. I think I should too. We have many things in common, Mrs. Mallaby. I think . . . I say, I've got a silly sort of habit of calling people who attract me by their first names. Would you be provincial enough to object if I called you Dorothy?

MRS. MALLABY. No, of course not. I like calling people by their Christian names. What is your Christian name?

BURMEISTER. Abraham, as a matter of fact. But that is no good. You may call me Ikey, as Pascal does. I shall not mind. Already you call me Ikey in your own soul.

MRS. MALLABY. How did you know?

BURMEISTER. Why do you like me better than you like Pascal, Dorothy?

MRS. MALLABY. How did you know that too?

BURMEISTER. But why?

MRS. MALLABY. Because I think you understand things better. You are like me, you think of other people all the time. It is different with Bubbles. (BURMEISTER *flinches.*) Bubbles is more interested in himself than in anything else in the world.

BURMEISTER. You call him Bubbles, do you?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, yes. He told me it was quite usual. That's why I promised to call you Ikey.

BURMEISTER. Yes. I suppose that was why. I had perhaps hoped . . . But never mind. What lovely hands you have! An artist's hands. These little pads on the finger-tips. It is rather touching and rather heroic that through all the troubles of your little desert household you conserved the beauty of your hands.

MRS. MALLABY. Our family were always rather proud of their hands.

BURMEISTER. They are like the hands of Van Dyke's dear sensual English ladies—but more capable. They are hands with which a queen might strangle her slaves.

[*Enter* MALLABY *in a dressing-gown over pyjamas.*

MALLABY. Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't know . . . How do you do, Mr. Burmeister?

BURMEISTER. Mrs. Mallaby is a little tremulous at the noise of battle, Dr. Mallaby. She thinks your trumpeters are trumpeting too loudly.

MALLABY. Eh? I don't quite follow. Oh, the newspapers?

BURMEISTER. I think you had better look at the "Seneschal" first, Dr. Mallaby. The "Meteor" is rather strong meat for one unnurtured on its idiom.

MALLABY. "Consumption Cured at Last. Interview with Dr. Mallaby." I say, look here. I never authorised this sort of thing. (*Reading.*) Oh, I say! This is a bit thick. Oh, Lord! They'll think I'm a quack. What utter bilge! Oh, my God! Dorothy, have you seen this stuff? Mr. Burmeister, I wrote the interview myself and went over a proof in the office. I wrote it with the utmost care. They haven't left a single word as I put it. They . . . Oh, this won't do at all! Lord Pascal has no right whatever to distort what I said in this way. Where's the telephone?

BURMEISTER. Now, just sit down, Dr. Mallaby, and calm yourself and look at the thing sensibly.

MALLABY. I'm perfectly calm, sir. I never encountered such impudence in my life. *I'll* speak to Lord Pascal . . .

BURMEISTER. If you will please, very kindly, sit down, I shall try to put Pascal's point of view. There are two sides to every question.

MALLABY. Well, you've got to hear my side first.

BURMEISTER. I shall give it all the intelligence of which I am capable. Please proceed.

MALLABY (*his stammer reappearing*). Well, look here. This is the point. What I mean to say . . . Oh, it's scandalous! It's abominable!

BURMEISTER. That is not a very lucid expression of your point of view, Dr. Mallaby.

MALLABY. I know, I know. It's a kind of aphasia I get when I'm annoyed. If I get excited I talk like an idiot. But

I'm not. Not by a jugful. As the whole pack of you will very soon find.

BURMEISTER. Dr. Mallaby, you are like all really great men—inarticulate. And you have another characteristic of greatness: you do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.

MALLABY. I do more than blush. I'm crawling all over with shame and indignation.

BURMEISTER. Do you know, I think that is really rather snobbish of you. I remember once I was belated in a sort of seaside place and got talking with a girl on the Esplanade and took her to a dance-hall. When we got into the bright light, I felt as you must feel in the first onrush of Pascal's boyish enthusiasms. The poor girl's dressmaker was either colour blind or a malignant devil. Everybody seemed to be looking at us. But the girl had a heart of gold. And nobody really minded. We were in the big world, not in Mayfair.

MALLABY. I don't know what your sordid amours have got to do with me—or my wife.

BURMEISTER. They have everything to do with you. It is an allegory. You have come deliberately out of your stuffy little circle of medical snobs into the great world. Your surroundings are a little loud and vulgar, like the wind on the heath—Hampstead Heath. But they won't kill you. You are a world figure now, a little practitioner no longer. No great man has any right to be fastidious.

MALLABY. I don't know. These blatant rags have shaken the foundations of my life.

BURMEISTER. They are nothing. They are nothing. But I came to talk of more important things. I came to talk about the new laboratories.

MALLABY. What laboratories?

BURMEISTER. The proper setting for your work. Pascal and I are going to raise a hundred thousand for them.

MALLABY. Whatever for? I need a couple of rooms and a sink and gas and electric light and two or three things I have got already. Upon my word, you people seem to think that Research can only be done in a concrete palace full of test-

tubes and retorts and Germans in white coats like an advertisement for patent food.

BURMEISTER. Well, well. You will have to humour us lay people in our childish notions.

MALLABY. I'm damned if I will! What do you know about research, anyhow?

BURMEISTER. Now, now, now. You are not the only person to be considered. You are about to undertake the treatment and cure of some forty thousand patients, and Pascal and I (in our modest way) are to be associated with you in this enterprise. And Pascal and I do nothing on a small scale, I assure you.

MALLABY. But I've told you again and again my work is not past the experimental stage.

BURMEISTER. Exactly. We shall experiment on a large scale.

MALLABY. We shall experiment on the scale and by the methods that I choose.

MRS. MALLABY. George, George, George!

MALLABY. Don't George me. Be quiet, Dorothy. Will you be quiet?

MRS. MALLABY. I won't be quiet. What do you know about organising big things? You know all about chests and coughs and bacilli, but you know nothing about organisation, and Mr. Burmeister does. (*Bell rings.*) I wish you wouldn't be so difficult.

MALLABY. I'm not difficult. I am very easy to get on with. But I really must assert myself at the beginning. I won't be made a tool by any man.

BURMEISTER. My dear Dr. Mallaby. (*He lays his hand on* MALLABY'S *arm.*)

MALLABY. Don't paw me, sir! I can't stand being pawed!

BURMEISTER. I must say I entirely fail to understand . . .

MRS. MALLABY. Now do try to behave yourself, George. You have made enough scenes for one day. I don't see why you can't do business quietly and reasonably, instead of getting into the vapours and flying out in all directions.

MALLABY. I'm sorry, my dear, but I hate being touched.

MRS. MALLABY. Would you very much mind not touching him, Mr. Burmeister? He's such a baby in many things.

[*Enter* LORD PASCAL.

PASCAL. So here you are. I've just five minutes, but I was passing and thought I should drop in. How are you, Mrs. Mallaby? You look pale and tired. I must run you down to Brighton on Sunday. Nothing like the sea air for bucking you up. What do you think, Doctor, eh? 'Morning, Ikey.

MRS. MALLABY. It's most appallingly good of you, Lord Pascal, I . . .

PASCAL. Oh, that's nothing, that's nothing. Anything at all I can do. By George, Ikey, have you seen old Craye?

BURMEISTER. No.

PASCAL. I blew in to see him this morning. You know. The old kidney business. He looked like a very professional old thundercloud. Dug his hard knuckles into me, too. Told me I was a public enemy. We seem to have upset his china-barrow all right, Mallaby. Never mind. Old Sir Barnaby Beauchamp is writing a roaring great article for to-morrow's "Seneschal." He jumped at the chance of getting his knife into Craye's gang. How you doctors love each other!

MALLABY. Sir Barnaby Beauchamp! That doddering old quack. Oh, my God!

PASCAL. Quack! I must say you've an odd idea of professional etiquette, Mallaby. Sir Barnaby is at the head of his profession.

MALLABY. Then God help the profession.

PASCAL. He will have to. *I* am up against it now. Well, Mrs. Mallaby, I'll call for you at ten sharp on Sunday. Sorry I can't wait. Must get a move on.

MALLABY. Look here, Lord Pascal . . . I say, just a minute.

PASCAL. Drop my secretary a note, will you? if you've any suggestions to make. I must go.

MALLABY. Stop. This sort of thing can't go on.

PASCAL. Eh?

MALLABY. I want to come to a clear understanding about the whole business.

PASCAL. Didn't Burmeister explain everything to you? If he didn't, he will. He seems to have nothing to do in his forenoons. I happen to be rather a busy man. Will you be good enough to pass my hat?

MALLABY. This sort of thing can't go on.

PASCAL. Thank you very much. Good morning. [*Exit.*

BURMEISTER (*laughing*). When they make you a nobleman, Dr. Mallaby, you also will be under no obligation to be polite. Now, what can I explain to you? Look upon my time as your own.

MALLABY. I don't know. I don't know. My head's in a whirl. I must think, think, think.

BURMEISTER. I really think you had better, you know.

MALLABY. Excuse me, won't you? Dorothy—Mrs. Mallaby will entertain you. I—I am rather upset.

[*He picks up an armful of newspapers and goes out.*

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, poor George! Ikey, please tell me what Sir Anthony Craye will do to him.

BURMEISTER. HE WILL SET THE MACHINERY IN MOTION. HE WILL TAKE STEPS.

MRS. MALLABY. And what then?

BURMEISTER. Oh, the Academy will summon your husband before them to show cause why he acted in the public interest instead of for his Trades Union. Your husband will not go, but the most talkative K.C. we can brief most assuredly will. Old Sir Barnaby Beauchamp will write his head off, and there will be cheering crowds round this hotel, and Labour will move the adjournment of the House, and all the millionaires in England and America will pour gold into your husband's hat, and I shall build a Monumental Clinic and Royalty will open it, and the Academy of Medicine may fade rapidly away in an apoplexy for all anyone will care. And then Pascal will start another hare, and the two of you can go

to Italy for a year with no trouble in the world and something comfortable in the bank.

[*While he is speaking* AUNT DINAH *enters.*

AUNT DINAH. Is the Jew gentleman selling you anything, Dorothy?

MRS. MALLABY. Aunt Dinah, what a fright you gave me! You should be resting, dear. I was just about to bring you your elevenses cup of tea.

AUNT DINAH. I don't want tea.

BURMEISTER. This is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing you since your long journey, ma'am.

AUNT DINAH. The pleasure is mutual, sir. Have you retired from business?

BURMEISTER. Oh, no.

AUNT DINAH. Then you won't make much of your business, whatever it is, if you dance attendance on married women all morning. You're a pretty old man, but I'm a good piece older, and you can take my advice. I know your sort.

MRS. MALLABY. Aunt Dinah, you have got up on the wrong side of your bed this morning. I've never known you so naughty. Go back at once.

AUNT DINAH. I won't go back at once. It's time I took a hand in whatever is going on—high time. The big showman-looking fellow was here this morning too. The lord. Lords don't seem to be gentlemen nowadays. I don't suppose they ever were. These two are up to no good.

MRS. MALLABY. Aunt Dinah, *please!*

AUNT DINAH. And thank *you*. Where's George?

MRS. MALLABY. He's gone into his bedroom. I think you had better go and speak to him. He needs a little advice.

AUNT DINAH. Ha! You mean two's company, three's none. Very well, I'll go. But I'll leave the door open and I'll be back in a minute. [*Exit.*

MRS. MALLABY. Perhaps you had better go, Mr. Burmeister. I'm so sorry. It's such a terrible thing . . .

BURMEISTER. Till to-night, then. I shall call for you. We'll dine at a dear little quiet place. A nice restful evening.

I'll call for you at seven. Au revoir, my dear. I quite understand.

MRS. MALLABY (*like a French lady in a novel*). Au revoir, my friend.

BURMEISTER. I quite understand.

[*Exit* BURMEISTER.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, Mr. Burmeister, you've left something! Oh, he's gone.

[*She picks up a long suede case from the table. Hesitates. Opens it. Reads a visiting-card.*

Well, of all the cheek!!

[*She hides the pearl necklace under a sofa cushion and the card in the bosom of her dress. Enter* AUNT DINAH *and* DR. MALLABY.

AUNT DINAH. He's gone. I wanted George to kick him downstairs. It was very clever of him to run away first. He's a clever little man.

MRS. MALLABY. Aunt Dinah, you are absolutely unbearable.

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Ain't I? What are you going to do about it, George?

MALLABY. Do about what, Aunt Dinah?

AUNT DINAH. Do about what I told you in there.

MALLABY. Oh, that! Dorothy, Aunt Dinah thinks you are proposing to play me false with Mr. Burmeister. You aren't, are you?

MRS. MALLABY. No, of course not.

MALLABY. There. What did I tell you, Aunt Dinah?

AUNT DINAH. You said it all wrong. How else could the girl answer you? What else could she say?

MALLABY. I don't know what else she could say. Now run along to bed, and Dorothy will bring you a cup of tea.

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Poisoned, most likely.

MALLABY. If you say that word "poison" again I will give you a hypodermic injection of rusty screwnails. You know as well as I do that poisons are things in bottles with red labels. If you see a red label on the teapot don't drink the tea. That is all you have to do.

AUNT DINAH. Cunning bit of goods she is, anyhow.

MALLABY. But not so cunning as we are. I am very cunning myself, but you must be the cutest woman in the world. Isn't she cute, Dorothy?

MRS. MALLABY. Yes. Very cute.

AUNT DINAH. You're just flattering and making a fool of a poor old woman.

MALLABY. The worst old woman in London. A proper old baggage. Go to bed at once before I call a policeman to put you there.

AUNT DINAH. You wouldn't do that, George?

MALLABY. Wouldn't I, though! Off you go.

[*She goes, shaking her finger at him.*

MRS. MALLABY. George, I can't stand it any longer. She should be in a home.

MALLABY. No, she shouldn't. (*He goes moodily over to the fireplace.*) Oh, it's a bad world. My God, it's a bad world! I wish I were one of those fellows who always know what to do.

MRS. MALLABY. Well, you should——

MALLABY. Dolly, I don't like your friends. Upon my word I don't. They're too—too big for me.

MRS. MALLABY. They are surely not so big as a great scientist like you, dear.

MALLABY. I don't mean a sort of Darwin-Pasteur-John Hunter bigness. But like rogue elephants in a jungle somehow. And I can't find my gun. Dorothy, I'm conscious of a perfectly horrible atmosphere. It's like the war when I was attached to the Borderers at Vermelles. You can't describe it, but it's a sort of hot sickness. Disgusting. And you wish you'd never come. I wish I'd never come.

MRS. MALLABY. But you stuck out the war, dearest, and you must stick out this one. You're bound to win. You would have liked to fight the Germans in full armour with an Umpire to see that both sides kept the Rules of Chivalry, but you just had to do what a coarse-grained General told you, because he knew how to fight Germans and you didn't.

MALLABY. I wonder if they did know how to fight Germans.

MRS. MALLABY. Of course they did, dear. We won. Now look here, loved one, I'm stupider than you, but I can adapt myself to a situation better than you can.

MALLABY (*always fair*). That's quite true.

MRS. MALLABY. You've always said so. I can see quite, quite clearly, what you must do. You must be nice about this laboratory and nice about everything. You must look at the architect's plans as if you understand them, and you must be polite to Lord Pascal's little tame oily doctors—Sir Barnaby and Dr. Lapthorne. Please. For my sake. I know it's for the best. When you are Director of the Research Clinic you can tell them all to go and make a fuss elsewhere. Promise me that you will be good.

MALLABY. ". . . We feel
Divinity within us breeding wings."

MRS. MALLABY. What *are* you talking about?

MALLABY. "She took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband."

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, I see. You think old Burmeister's the serpent?

MALLABY. He's a subtle brute.

MRS. MALLABY. Rubbish! Go now and get dressed up like a shining old inventor, and we'll have a rich luncheon in some splendid place.

MALLABY. You're a great comfort to me, Dolly.

[*He kisses her and goes out.* MRS. MALLABY *sighs, lifts the sofa cushion and takes out the string of pearls. She runs it furtively through her fingers humming a phrase from Gounod's Jewel Song. The telephone bell rings.*

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, damn! It's been going all morning. Well? Yes. Sir what? Very well. Yes, yes. Yes, he may come up. More visitors! And it is not the eleventh hour. And *what* a visitor. How funny!

[*Tidies the room. Enter* SIR ANTHONY CRAYE.

SIR ANTHONY. Good morning, Mrs. Mallaby.

MRS. MALLABY. Good morning, Sir Anthony. This is an unexpected pleasure.

SIR ANTHONY. No doubt, no doubt. I had hoped to see your husband. Has he gone out?

MRS. MALLABY. No, he is dressing. Won't you sit down?

SIR ANTHONY. Thank you. . . . I don't know this hotel. At least, I was called in once to see a poor fellow with a perforated duodenal ulcer. About five years ago. He hasn't paid my fee yet, by the way. . . .

MRS. MALLABY. No?

SIR ANTHONY. No. Mind if I smoke?

MRS. MALLABY. Not at all.

SIR ANTHONY. You comfortable here?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, yes. Of course it's much more splendid than we're accustomed to.

SIR ANTHONY. I hate hotels, myself. . . . Mrs. Mallaby.

MRS. MALLABY. Yes, Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. I called . . . well, not to put too fine a point on it . . . you shouldn't have come to London.

MRS. MALLABY. Do you know, I prefer not to discuss my husband's affairs with you, Sir Anthony. Silly of me, but there it is.

SIR ANTHONY. Well. It is not entirely on his account that I have come.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh?

SIR ANTHONY. No, Mrs. Mallaby, I am quite aware that my attitude may seem rather odd to you. We—we hardly know each other, and there have already been awkward corners in our comparatively brief acquaintance. But you are a very young woman, a very attractive, rather impulsive young woman, with, if you will allow me to say so, rather an inadequate experience of life. Now, I am old enough to be your—your uncle, and I may tell you that I have conceived a very real regard for you.

MRS. MALLABY. How thrilling!

SIR ANTHONY. Please. I am perfectly serious. I want to

be your friemd. And it is my duty to give you a friendly word of warning.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, but I know late nights and things are bad for me. My husband's a doctor too, you remember.

SIR ANTHONY. I am not advising you in a professional capacity. May I go on?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, do! I'm dying to hear your solemn warning.

SIR ANTHONY. Mrs. Mallaby, Pascal and Burmeister are very decent fellows. They are friends of mine. I have a high regard for both of them. Pascal particularly is a charming fellow, and Burmeister, when you get to know him . . . Well, the point is this . . .

MRS. MALLABY. Yes. Aren't they nice? So kind and unconventional and pally. I feel as if . . .

SIR ANTHONY. Let me finish what I was going to say. They are both very good at heart, but they are radically irresponsible. Irresponsible.

MRS. MALLABY. What an extraordinary adjective to use! With all these huge concerns depending upon them!

SIR ANTHONY. You misunderstand me. It is difficult. Mrs. Mallaby, it isn't wise, it isn't safe for a young married woman like you to be mixed up with a chap like Pascal.

MRS. MALLABY. Look here, Sir Anthony . . .

SIR ANTHONY. Now, now. Please, please listen. He is all right in a way, but he has different views, different standards from those to which you and I are accustomed.

MRS. MALLABY. You mean that your friend is an immoral man?

SIR ANTHONY. No, no. We don't use such expressions nowadays. It's a matter of standards, if you see what I mean. What I mean to say is. . . . Damn it, Mrs. Mallaby, I won't have you compromised! I'm not an early Victorian, God knows, but I won't have it.

MRS. MALLABY. Really!

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, I know it sounds—I don't know how it sounds. But please believe me, my dear lady, you don't

know these men. Absolutely bluntly, they're capable of anything. Even Burmeister.

MRS. MALLABY. This is the weirdest conversation I ever had in my life. You came, then, to warn me against Lord Pascal and Mr.—oh, dear!—Mr. Burmeister?

SIR ANTHONY. In a way, yes. I did.

MRS. MALLABY. To save the village maiden from worse than death?

SIR ANTHONY. Don't make fun of it. Mrs. Mallaby. You're too—too—ah, um—to, to, to . . . I mean he's not *sincere*. It's all a game to him. I simply couldn't keep silent. I've never met anybody who interested me more than you do. Believe me, I am only animated by a regard for your welfare. . . . (BURMEISTER's *pearls fall on the floor*.) I say, I'm sorry. How clumsy of me! I've knocked down your pearls.

MRS. MALLABY. It's quite all right, thanks. Please don't bother. I've been shopping this morning.

SIR ANTHONY. Yes?

MRS. MALLABY. What do you mean? (*she pushes them under the cushion.* CRAYE *stiffens.*)

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, nothing. Only a thought crossed my mind. Pascal told me he was coming here this morning.

MRS. MALLABY. It's—it's very sweet of you to take all this trouble.

SIR ANTHONY. Not at all.

MRS. MALLABY. I'll try to be good.

SIR ANTHONY. I hope you will. There is another matter. I may appear to be interfering in other people's business. I can't help that. This mess your husband has got himself into is none of my business yet. But I must inform you that it *will* be my business very soon. As President of the Academy of Medicine. I am exceedingly sorry for it.

MRS. MALLABY. What exactly do you mean?

SIR ANTHONY. I shall be brutally frank with you. Dr. Mallaby has already been guilty of infamous conduct in a professional respect, and the Academy will have no alternative but to erase his name, unless——

MRS. MALLABY. Unless what?

SIR ANTHONY. Unless he publishes an instant disclaimer and gets back to his practice at once. In that case I shall use what little influence I have in his favour.

MRS. MALLABY. So you are to be prosecutor, judge, jury, hangman and blackmailer, Sir Anthony Craye. Verdict first, trial afterwards, like the King of Hearts in "Alice." How dare you come to me with such a story?

SIR ANTHONY. I should let your husband hang himself in his own way. But I have a sneaking regard for him, and, as I tell you, for you too.

MRS. MALLABY (*sweeping him a curtsey*). God bless you, sir.

SIR ANTHONY. I cannot conceive that either you or he has counted the cost before you allowed yourselves to be entangled in this mad escapade. Don't you realise it means ruin?

MRS. MALLABY. You seem determined to ruin poor George without so much as hearing his side of the question.

SIR ANTHONY. His side of the question will be fairly dealt with. But, quite plainly, he has broken his obligations and pledged his honour for money. These things, to us, are infamous conduct, and are not forgiven. Any benefit the medical profession has been able to give to mankind, Mrs. Mallaby, has been the result of laborious thinking, keen criticism, high moral standards and disciplined action. Your husband's theories may be right or wrong. But his first duty was to lay them humbly before his teachers and the fellows of his craft. If they were approved he must give them to his profession freely, without thought of personal gain. That is our great tradition, and he has broken that tradition. He has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, my dear.

MRS. MALLABY. But he wanted to give them to the profession, and they wouldn't listen to him.

SIR ANTHONY. His duty was to wait, then.

MRS. MALLABY. And was it the duty of the sick people to wait?

SIR ANTHONY. My dear, sick people cannot judge what is good for them. Nor can a man, blinded by the hope of glory

and money, judge the value of his own work. Waiting is the great safeguard against harm and heartbreak.

MRS. MALLABY. What beautiful words! Dr. Craye, you know quite well why George couldn't get his papers published. It was because he was only a poor little unknown G.P. with no friends at court; and because he was certain to tread on the toes of some fat professor or other. He told me so himself.

SIR ANTHONY. Even if that were true—which it certainly isn't—it doesn't alter the main principle.

MRS. MALLABY. Don't you men adore principles! They are the perfect excuse for all the laziness and snobbery in the world.

SIR ANTHONY. That may be. At my time of life I never argue with a woman. But my profession exists on principles.

MRS. MALLABY. I'm sure it does. But why should it exist? It's a failure, your profession. You cure nothing. You just come into people's bedrooms in black coats and tell lies—and Greek lies at that—George says so.

SIR ANTHONY. You are presuming on your position as a doctor's wife. Doctors' wives should understand their husbands' little jokes.

MRS. MALLABY. No wife can be bothered with her husband's little jokes. They are the curse of matrimony. But if that about the black coats and the Greek is a joke, I don't see the point. It's true all the same.

[GEORGE *is heard singing, a thought dolefully.*

SIR ANTHONY. Good Lord! What is that?

MRS. MALLABY. It is George, singing.

SIR ANTHONY. I thought for a moment—— Never mind. He appears to take it all very lightly.

MRS. MALLABY. Of course he does! Gaily! Sir Anthony, you do not realise what you are up against. He looks a meek little man. But he can hang on like grim death. And he will. And all the doctors in all the consulting-rooms in all Harley Street and Cavendish Square can Hum and Ha and shake their heads till they are black in the face. He won't mind a bit. He doesn't give *that* for you! He won't move an

inch. And neither will I. And good morning, Dr Craye. You need not bother to call again.

SIR ANTHONY. Mrs. Mallaby. If only I . . . Look here, my dear, do be sensible. I promise you on my honour that your husband's work will have every consideration—though the Lord knows how we are going to manage it now. But I'm speaking as a friend. It's a terrible thing for a doctor to lose caste. The public don't understand. But, then, they don't understand working for the love of mankind or anything that's worth doing. You of all people, though, you should understand.

MRS. MALLABY. I said "Good morning," Sir Anthony. Will you kindly go?

SIR ANTHONY. Very well, I'll go. But remember I tried to be your friend and—— [*He goes. Enter* MALLABY.

MALLABY. Who was that?

MRS. MALLABY. Sir Anthony Craye. (*She speaks a little absently.*)

MALLABY. Why didn't you tell me? What did he want? What did he say?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, threats, threats, threats and platitudes and hypocrisy and more threats! I couldn't let you see him. I can't let you see irritating people just now. You would have killed him, I think. How nice and worried and noble you look, darling one. But your necktie is a little bit left-earish, if I dare say so. Let his poor ordinary adoring wife put it straight. There now. Do you know the old Crayfish said if you would be good and humble and polite, that your work would have the most careful consideration—possible—under the circumstances. Wouldn't you like to put on a white sheet and go up Harley Street with a candle in your hand and say, "Please, Sir Anthony"? Wouldn't you, George?

MALLABY. What about lunch? I'm as hungry as a hawk. Go and get your hat on.

MRS. MALLABY. Good, George! I'm very proud of you. I shan't be a minute. [*Exit.*

[MALLABY, *grim and elated, stamps round the room with his hands in his pockets. Enter* CRAYE.

MALLABY. Ah! Oh! Good morning.

SIR ANTHONY. Good morning. Is Mrs. Mallaby . . .?

MALLABY. No, sir. She isn't.

SIR ANTHONY. Never mind. It's you I want to see. I felt I must come back. Mallaby, this can't go on.

MALLABY. It can't, can't it?

SIR ANTHONY. No. Listen, Mallaby, I am an older man than you are and I . . .

MALLABY. I know perfectly well what you are. You are the Colonel of the monstrous regiment of old women who are about to drum me out. That's what you want to tell me, isn't it? I am not impressed either by the importance of your position or by you.

SIR ANTHONY. Very well then, we can talk as man to man. You've made a devil of a false step, and unless you instantly withdraw and write a disclaimer you will be struck off the register.

MALLABY. Why?

SIR ANTHONY. Why! You know very well why. We must keep the profession clean. It is our duty to it and to humanity.

MALLABY. I, too, have a duty to my profession and to humanity and to myself.

SIR ANTHONY. A duty you delegate to the cheap press.

MALLABY. What have they got to do with it? They are nothing. Even humanity isn't so much in face of . . . I tell you I will not have the motions and creations of my mind cramped, conditioned and stereotyped by you and your damned machine. I tell you . . .

SIR ANTHONY. Have it as you wish. But if you meddle with the machine you will be smashed.

MALLABY. Very well, then. I shall be smashed.

SIR ANTHONY. That's your last word?

MALLABY. That's my last word.

SIR ANTHONY. Good-bye, then.

MALLABY. Good-bye.

CURTAIN

ACT III

DR. MALLABY'S *consulting-room. It is in a devil of a mess. The blind is broken. Two empty bottles lie on the fireplace. There is a litter of papers and clothing. The time is late afternoon in autumn.* MALLABY *and* AUNT DINAH *are playing double dummy on either side of the doctor's desk. A whisky bottle, a syphon and a glass stand near to the doctor's hand.* MALLABY *has degenerated. He is unshaven and wears an old velvet coat with a torn sleeve. His feet are in carpet slippers and he has no collar.*

AUNT DINAH. Aha! Aha!

MALLABY. What do you mean, "Aha!"?

AUNT DINAH. Never you mind what I mean, "Aha!" You will learn your fate soon enough. . . . Four no trumps.

MALLABY. Oh, I double you, I suppose.

AUNT DINAH. Oh, good! Oh, good! [MALLABY *drinks.*

AUNT DINAH. Stop that, George.

MALLABY. Stop what?

AUNT DINAH. You know jolly well what. It isn't as if it made you drunk. Ho! I've been drunk often and often, and it *always* did me good. Here's to good old whisky, it makes you feel so frisky. . . . But it doesn't make you so frisky a tall, at all, at all. It only makes you sullen and dirty and ugly.

MALLABY. Go on with the game.

AUNT DINAH. And smelly.

MALLABY. Dummy plays.

AUNT DINAH. Oh, what a lie!

MALLABY. Dummy's King of Diamonds took my Queen.

AUNT DINAH. What lies! George, remember, they've struck you off the Register. You're not a doctor any more. No need to tell lies. What did you say?

MALLABY. Dummy's King of Diamonds took my Queen.

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Yes. Yes. That's right. Funny. The King of Diamonds took old George's Queen. Took her away to the Continong. Ping-pong.

MALLABY. Blast you, Aunt Dinah, you're supposed to be playing cards.

AUNT DINAH. Supposed! Oh, listen, everybody. Oh, St. Michael and All Angels with wings and things, will you listen to that! Well, Dummy *will* play. Yes, yes, indeed he will. And Dummy could play you out of your five wits, George. Yes, and go home to tea and bread and butter and marmalade and . . . Where was I? Yes. The four of spades . . .

MALLABY. Your trick.

AUNT DINAH. Mind you, you play better Bridge than Dolly did. (*Laughs.*) Dolly!

MALLABY. Dry up, now. Dry up.

AUNT DINAH. What do you think of your Dolly now?

MALLABY. Your lead. (*Drinks.*)

AUNT DINAH. I'm perfectly well aware that it is my lead. So Dolly ran off with the old Yid. Deserted the sinking ship like a beautiful white rat waving its pretty tail.

MALLABY. The ship's sunk all right. By the head. Straight to the bottom.

AUNT DINAH. Why did she choose the Jew? That's what bothers me. Why not old Craye? That would have been fun. You always suspected the poor old doctor. And he broke you, George. Spoils to the victor, George. Spoils to the Kinkering Kong. He should have had Dolly by rights. . . . Ha! You revoked!

MALLABY. Sorry.

AUNT DINAH. Why don't you pay attention to the game? Not paying attention. That's what's put the Peter on you. That's what's voodooed you.

MALLABY. Voodooed! That's the word. That's lost me my wife and my livelihood and my professional honour and my life's work and my self-respect. . . . Oh, damnation to it all. (*Drinks.*)

AUNT DINAH. The rest are mine. Game and rubber. And don't drink and swear. Drinking and swearing won't help.

MALLABY. Nothing will help. (*Gets up and walks about.*)

AUNT DINAH. Ah, no, no, no, no! Don't say that. I'm a little bit daft, but I will. I'll help.

MALLABY. Dear silly old woman, how can you help?

[*He stops before a map of the Near East and stares at it.*

AUNT DINAH. I can help by getting that lazy besom of a serving-wench to bring a cup of tea. Come away from that map. What have you to do with Jerusalem or Madagascar or North or South Amerikee? Are you tidy for tea? Eh! (MALLABY *laughs.*) Your hands are piggy. You haven't washed behind the ears. Or anywhere. Nor shaved. You look like a suet pudding that has fallen on a doormat. Bristles, bristles everywhere. Go at once and shave.

MALLABY. What's the good?

AUNT DINAH. It's good to do what you're told, for once in a way. Do you hear me speaking to you, George Mallaby? You are a repulsive spectacle. Hurry. I am going to ring. With a loud ting ting. Aha! The Jocund Spring.

MALLABY. Oh, all right.

[*He goes out.* AUNT DINAH *rings the bell and goes over to the map.*

AUNT DINAH. Tyre, Sidon, Damascus, Zoba, Zedad, Palmyra. How far is it to Babylon, to Babylon, to Babylon?

[*Enter* MAIDSERVANT.

MAID. Did you ring?

AUNT DINAH. Did I not? What about tea? It's hours and hours past four.

MAID. I didn't know whether you wanted any. The kettle's just on the boil, anyhow.

AUNT DINAH. If all the truth were told, I suppose you thought you could do just what you liked.

MAID. I never thought nothing of the sort.

AUNT DINAH. Don't answer back. You did.

MAID. Well, things is in such a mess. Cook and me don't know where we are.

AUNT DINAH. Who knows where anybody is?

MAID. We don't even know whether the doctor's a doctor any more. Or whether Mrs. Mallaby's coming back. Or when we're to see our wages and insurance stamps.

AUNT DINAH. I'll tell you if you like. The doctor's not a doctor any more. He's found out a cure for something or other, and up comes the great Lord Rascal, and he boomed it liked Bile-Beans for Biliousness, and up comes old Doctor Craye and says, "Aha! Hi! Stop! This is not allowed!" And then he took away George Mallaby's diploma to prevent him signing death certificates. And Lord Rascal, he said it was a scandal in all his newspapers, and he got snuffy, stuffy, frowsy Labour Members of Parliament to ask questions. Oh, dear oh! There *was* a row. Then they had a Royal Commission. Do you know what a Royal Commission is, my girl?

MAID. No, I don't.

AUNT DINAH. Neither do I. They had one, anyhow. And all the professors in all the laboratories were set to work to look into this cure of my nephew George's. And what do you think they found?

MAID. I'm sure I don't know.

AUNT DINAH. Aha! I caught you out again. They found a fallacy. Do you know what a fallacy is?

MAID. No, I don't.

AUNT DINAH. Ho! There's free compulsory education for you! I expect you thought it was a kind of insect. I'll tell you what a fallacy is. A fallacy is a falsitude. So now you know. Say thank you, Miss.

MAID. Thank you, Miss.

AUNT DINAH. Don't mention it. They found that George had made a mistake. So they said so. In a Yellow Book they said it.

MAID. Why in a Yellow Book?

AUNT DINAH. Why not? Don't interrupt. What do you think happened then?

MAID. I'm sure I don't know, Miss.

AUNT DINAH. Lord Rascal and all his newspapers dropped

George as if he had been something brought in by the cat. Flat on the mat. George went to see Lord Rascal. But did he see him? No, no. No, no. A weight-lifter in Ruritarian uniform threw George into the street. He hurt his elbow. It is still bruised. Blue and yellow like bluebells and sweet blooming primroses.

MAID. Tck! Tck! Wasn't that awful now, Miss Dinah?

AUNT DINAH. Wasn't it? So he went to see Mr. Burmeister, the Jew. This is the best part. Wouldn't you like Cook to come in and hear this?

MAID. Oh, I'll tell Cook all right, Miss Dinah, if I can make head or tail of it.

AUNT DINAH. Very well. Mr. Burmeister wasn't at home. Where was he, then? Aha! The plot thickens.

MAID. Does it, ma'am?

AUNT DINAH. Yes, it does. Thickens and thickens. He had gone. And Dolly—Mrs. Mallaby, had gone with him.

MAID. Oh, dear me!

AUNT DINAH. You may well "dear you." Bolted, the two of them. To the Black Forest. In Germany. Fancy that! Personally I would have gone to Paris. Or Bucharest. The Black Forest! I never heard the like of that. Like Mr. Day and Mrs. Martin.

MAID. Poor Dr. Mallaby! He must have been in a terrible taking!

AUNT DINAH. He was! He was! He said. . . . Now, if I haven't forgotten what he said when he came back to the hotel. And it's important. George! George!

MALLABY (*upstairs*). Hello! What is it?

AUNT DINAH. Come here. I want you. . . . He'll be in in a moment. He'll tell you himself.

MAID. I didn't quite know whether . . .

AUNT DINAH. Oh, he'll tell you all right.

[*Enter* MALLABY. *He is half-shaved and carries a razor and a shaving-brush. He wears a shabby but brilliant dressing-gown.*

MALLABY. What is it now?

MAID. It's nothing, sir, really. It's only a notion of Miss Dinah's. I'll go and fetch the tea. (*She goes out.*)

AUNT DINAH. Tuts! The girl's daft. I was telling her the whole story.

MALLABY. What about?

AUNT DINAH. About you and Dolly and Burmeister and Rascal and so forth.

MALLABY. Do you mean you were discussing my private affairs with the servants?

AUNT DINAH. Private? Ho! Fine privacy!

MALLABY. Oh, well, it doesn't matter.

[*He goes back to the map, lathering himself absently down one side.*

My God! How a map *glows* at you if you've lighted on only one little patch of it, ever so long ago. There's old Mount Gilboah—where they'll fight Armageddon some day, Aunt Dinah—I can see a little orange grove there in the heat and smell the salt odours and hear the chunk of the camel bells. Coming in from the desert. The desert. Horizons. Space. Room to turn round and about. And dense desiccated wisdom lying silent under the sands. (*A bell rings.*) What's that? Who the devil's that?

AUNT DINAH. Oh, probably three fine gentlemen come to make your fortune for you.

MALLABY. See here, you bedraggled old basilisk, I've had about enough of you. I'll whitewash your nasty old face with shaving soap.

AUNT DINAH. George, I'll thank you to treat me with due and sufficient respect. With due respect and with sufficient respect. And keep your shaving soap to cool your porridge.

MALLABY. Ha! You stand on your dignity, you creature!

AUNT DINAH. Never mind what I stand on. I stand like a lady on my lower limbs.

MALLABY. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll tickle you.

AUNT DINAH. No. No. No. No. That is one thing I could never abide.

MALLABY. Well, say you're sorry.

AUNT DINAH. I am nothing of the kind sorry, as you shall very soon see, George Mallabee, the ex-M.D. Who gave up practice to go on the spree—with me.

MALLABY. You won't apologise? I'll give you till I count six.

AUNT DINAH. You won't frighten me. I'm the bravest woman I ever knew.

MALLABY. One—two.

AUNT DINAH. "Buckle my shoe."

MALLABY. Three—four.

AUNT DINAH. "Open the door."

MALLABY. Five—six.

AUNT DINAH. Don't, George. "Pick up sticks." Don't you dare! Oh, you black, bad villain! I'll call a policeman. Stop thief!

[*He catches her after a stern chase, hoists her on to his shoulder and is marching with her to the door when the* MAID *enters and confronts them.*

MAID. Oh, mercy me!

AUNT DINAH. Well? Give your message, girl. Don't stand there stuttering and fluttering and stammering and yammering! What is it?

MAID. It's Mrs. Anderson and Willie to see the doctor.

AUNT DINAH (*getting down*). Then why didn't you say so at first? (*Goes out.*)

MAID. Will you see them, sir?

MALLABY. Eh? What do they want to see me about? Haven't they heard?

MAID. Oh yes, sir, I think so. And if you please, I want to give notice.

MALLABY. Do you? All right. . . . Why, though?

MAID. Why do I want to give notice?

MALLABY. Why do you want to give notice?

MAID. Well, sir, after what Miss Dinah told me—about Mrs. Mallaby and so forth—and the way things have been going on, and if you please, sir, your drinking and the house all upside down—no decent girl would stay here.

MALLABY. You want me to conform to the standards of what you call a decent girl, eh? Well, I'll conform now to what I please. And you do what you please. And let nobody bully you out of it, if you take my advice. . . . All right. Clear out when and how you like. I suppose I can find your wages for you somewhere.

MAID. Thank you, sir. (*To* MRS. ANDERSON *in the passage.*) Come in. He'll see you.

MALLABY. "To act with a heart maddened with sorrow . . .!" Come in, come in, come in!

[MRS. ANDERSON *and* WILLIE *come in as the* MAID *goes out.*

Ha! Hum! Well, well, well, well, well! And how are we to-day? Do sit down. Sit down, William. And what can we do for you?

MRS. ANDERSON. I am real glad to see you again, Doctor.

MALLABY. Don't. Don't call me "Doctor." I don't call you "Patient." And besides, I am not a doctor any more.

MRS. ANDERSON. Aye. We heard something of it down by in the village. And about poor Mrs. Mallaby.

MALLABY. You did, did you?

WILLIE. Ugh! Come on away hame, Ma!

MRS. ANDERSON. They're real sorry for you down in the village—what with poor young Mrs. Mallaby going off like that and all. It would be with a London gentleman, they're saying.

MALLABY. It was a Jerusalem gentleman. And now what did you come here for? As you see, I am very busy.

MRS ANDERSON. They're saying the cure did awful well in London.

MALLABY. What cure? Do you mean Mallaby's serum?

MRS. ANDERSON. That's it. Like Doctor William's Pink Pills.

MALLABY. Don't let's talk about that, Mrs. Anderson. It isn't a cure at all. The pathologists, Mrs. Anderson, and half of the hospitals dedicated to half the saints in the Golden Legend have gone out of their way to slay Mallaby and his blooming serum. You'll find it all in print. One of H.M.

Stationery Office's best sellers. "Mallaby's serum is no damn good. Won't cure phthisis, nor chilblains, nor colds, nor female ailments, nor wash clothes, nor kill tubercle bacilli, moths, fleas, bugs or beetles." And they prove it, Mrs. Anderson, by curves and logarithms and capital letters. And the upshot is, Mrs. Anderson, that they have adjudged me guilty of infamous conduct and removed my licence to practise.

MRS. ANDERSON. Well, now, that's a wee bit too deep for my understanding. Does it mean, like, that you cannae see any more patients?

MALLABY. Yes . . . Yes . . . It does! By Jove, it does!

MRS. ANDERSON. Tchk! Tchk! Is that not awful! And you was such a clever, clever doctor too! I says to Mrs. Blatherwick, I says: "I can't believe it," I says. "Look at Willie," I says. "He cured him," I says. Of course, I never let dab that I was giving him Pottinger's Balsam all the time, unbeknown to you, but it's my belief your treatment did him good. And now he'll have to tramp all the way to Dr. Armistead to get his lines signed. And him not strong. After I got the shop shut, thinks I, I'll just run round and see if it's all true. Now, what I wanted to know is, now you're not a doctor any more, I suppose it'll be much dearer to attend you? Or maybe you'll not charge so much to attend to your old patients.

MALLABY. I'm my own master. I'm my own master. By gum, that's true.

MRS. ANDERSON. What was you saying, Doctor?

MALLABY. I was saying that you look very pale. I should judge from your appearance that your colon is ballooned; and your gall-bladder is crawling with streptococci and your blood spotty with eosinophils.

MRS. ANDERSON. My goodness me!

WILLIE. !—Ma!

MALLABY. Look up. Look down. Ah! . . . What did you dream about last night? You may be perfectly frank with

me. Willie, take up that book and look at the pictures. It is an Atlas of the Digestive System. I shall deal with you presently. Come along, Mrs. Anderson, I'm waiting.

MRS. ANDERSON. Am I to tell you?

MALLABY. You are.

MRS. ANDERSON. But I cannae remember what I dreamt last night.

MALLABY. Ah! That is very significant. Try hard. Your censor, Mrs. Anderson, is attempting to prevent the sublimation of your libido. And a good job too, I should think.

MRS. ANDERSON. Do you tell me that, Doctor? I mind now. I dreamt I was feeding the hens.

MALLABY. You dreamt you were feeding the hens. Ah! How foolhardy it is to show female children tin-type photographs of their grandfathers! I am never tired of saying so. O tempora! O mores! O conditiones vitae!

MRS. ANDERSON. Is it something awful, Doctor? It was only Willie I wanted you to see, Doctor. I didn't know I was that bad. I was feeling a wee bit funny this long while, but I didn't know I was that bad.

MALLABY. Few of us know how bad we are—or how good we are. A solemn thought.

WILLIE. Ugh, come on away, Ma!

MALLABY. That's right. Take her away. I have hated your face, Mrs. Anderson, for years, without admitting so much to myself. But now I know. I can give rein to my loathing. How I hate you, woman!

MRS. ANDERSON. Mercy me! What's come over him now?

[AUNT DINAH *enters.*

AUNT DINAH. What is it?

MALLABY. Listen. You said there was no need to tell lies any more. I've only just realised the—the full splendour of it.

AUNT DINAH. And you, George, go on shaving. You can only think of one thing at a time. Not like me. I'm daft. I can think of a million things at a time. I have to in this house.

MRS. ANDERSON. Oh, he's taken bad, Willie. What shall we do?

WILLIE. Come on away, Ma.

AUNT DINAH. Well, what are you staring at? Don't you see the gentleman's realising splendours? Do you think he can be bothered with a mouldy old faggot like you lying about the place? Take a hint, take a sprint, before I take a running jump at you.

MRS. ANDERSON. I'll thank you, Ma'am, not to speak to me like that.

AUNT DINAH. There was a poker here once. Oh, Joy (without alloy), here it is. Wahoo to you, woman!

MRS. ANDERSON. Mercy me!

[*She and* WILLIE *race to the door and through it.*

AUNT DINAH. A virtuous woman should protect her menfolk from unwelcome guests. Have you finished shaving?

MALLABY. Nearly.

AUNT DINAH. What a shaky hand you have! What did that person want?

MALLABY. How should I know?

AUNT DINAH. I expect she wanted to know what you were going to do. What are you going to do, George?

MALLABY. What would you like to do?

[MAIDSERVANT *comes in with the tea-things.*

AUNT DINAH. Put them down on the desk. Carefully. And get a jacket and a waistcoat and a collar and a tie for your master.

[MAID *lays down the tray, sniffs and goes out.*

What would I like to do? Well, now. That's a question.

[*She pours out tea.* MALLABY *has finished shaving and dries his face on the curtain.*

I should like to go several thousand miles on a motor-car that goes more than a hundred miles an hour. Or an aeroplane. Heaven lies about us in an aeroplane. Are you going to divorce Dolly?

MALLABY. No. I've made positively my last public appearance.

AUNT DINAH. Have you any money, George?

MALLABY. I don't know. Four hundred a year, I think.

AUNT DINAH. So have I. You'll have to use mine. Your four hundred will just about pay for two bottles of whisky a day. Do you think that would do? Or would you rather do something else?

MALLABY. Something else than what?

AUNT DINAH. Something else than drink whisky.

MALLABY. What else am I fit for? What else am I fit for?

AUNT DINAH. Well, don't spit whisky all over me. What do you think you're fit for? Anybody can drink whisky, if he keeps his strength or his thirst or whatever it is. But you're George Mallaby. Why not go to Mount Gilboah, or wherever it is? In a motor-car. . . . All of these beauties fell in love with Dolly in the first five minutes.

MALLABY. Did they?

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Only the old doctor hadn't a chance. He was born to be crossed in love, just as the other two were born to be hanged. Only they'll cheat the hangman. A nice pair of cheats, that pair.

MALLABY. Oh, I don't know. I suppose the big men, the men who count, have always been like that since the beginning of time. . . . I say, Aunt Dinah, I'd better keep my head. You were right to make me shave myself or I'd have gone Berserk and had the roof off the house. God! I'm free now. . . . I never . . . I say, make me think of something else! (*He has opened a drawer in the desk and is fumbling with its contents.*)

AUNT DINAH. It's growing as dark as soup. Thunder. We'll have a fine, roaring, rip-snorting thunder-plump in a minute or two. Have some more tea. What are you playing with? Money?

MALLABY. It's some old coins. One thing and another, I haven't looked at them for years. That's a gold stater, struck by Alexander the Great. There's a tetradrachm from Tyre—fourth century before Christ—you see the God, Melkart, riding on a sea-horse? There's an old dirkem of Abd-al-Malik. These little letters like latchkeys mean that

there is no God but Allah! He hath no associate. I wonder if that's true. The coin is from the Mint at Damascus. It was found at Ctesiphon. They had a big banqueting-hall there, Aunt Dinah. Miles they carried the coin across the Arabian desert, day and night, sun and stars—perhaps a Ctesiphon waiter got it for a tip.

AUNT DINAH. Can you read it? That stuff on the coin?

MALLABY. Arabic? Good Lord, yes.

[MAIDSERVANT *comes in with coat, collar, etc.*

MAID. Here's your coat.

MALLABY. Thank you, Maggie.

[*Exit* MAID. MALLABY *fixes his collar.*

I was born in Basrah—like Sinbad the Sailor. Sinbad the Sailor! Isn't it rot to say a man's only got one life? Funny fate that I should be fixed as a doctor. Up here in the rain and clouds and snow. Well, I've got unfixed again and no mistake. [*A rumble far off.*

AUNT DINAH. There's the thunder! No, it isn't. Do you hear it?

MALLABY. Hear what?

AUNT DINAH. That rumble. It's an automobile. Nearer, nearer, nearer. Oh, hooray for it. . . . No. It's only Shand's old Darracq. That's no good to me.

MALLABY. By Jove, it's growing dark! Who can it be?

AUNT DINAH. Somebody to see me. Clear your stuff out of here. And put on your necktie, and wash the soap off your face. Be off with you, and don't disgrace me any more.

MALLABY. Oh, all right, all right. You *are* an old fiend.

[*Goes out listlessly.*

AUNT DINAH. And not that necktie. The spotted one.

[*A bell.* AUNT DINAH *skips to the passage. A pause.*

AUNT DINAH (*in the passage*). Hello, Dolly! Back again? And high time too. Things have come to a pretty pass. And I've seen prettier passes, such as Killiecrankie. Do come in. . . . (*She leads in* MRS. MALLABY *and* SIR ANTHONY CRAYE.)

The kitchen garden is hellish, and Marion has forgotten

her place. Have you learned your lesson yet? . . . Oh, I didn't see who it was in the dense passage. It's the old doctor who smashed George and struck him off the roll. Did you run off with her, after all?

SIR ANTHONY. There, there, Miss Bullfinch.

AUNT DINAH. "There, there!" Whoever heard anyone saying "There, there"? There, there, yourself, you bad old man.

SIR ANTHONY. Miss Bullfinch, perhaps you will take Mrs. Mallaby to her room. She has been travelling all day and is very tired. I should like to see Dr. Mallaby here.

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. She looks like poor Mary's ghost. I'll take charge of her. I take charge of everything now. That makes you laugh, eh? Come away, Dolly. . . . George! George! Here's the old Crayfish to see you.

[*Exeunt* AUNT DINAH *and* MRS. MALLABY.

[*Even when he has no audience* SIR ANTHONY *is a bit of a play-actor. He shakes his head sadly as he gazes on the ruins. Enter* MALLABY. *He wears the dressing-gown still, but has put on a collar and tie and looks almost respectable.*

SIR ANTHONY. Good morning, Mallaby!

MALLABY (*ignoring his hand*). Well?

SIR ANTHONY. I have come on a curious mission, Mallaby.

MALLABY. Very curious.

SIR ANTHONY. I hardly know how to begin.

MALLABY. Must you begin at all? That's the point. I don't want to talk to you nor ever to see you again.

SIR ANTHONY. Be quiet for a moment and listen. I have come to ask you to do something very difficult.

MALLABY. You have evidently come to stammer and blether and be pompous and sententious and impressive as usual. You are wasting your time on me. I am not a public meeting. I'm not even a man. You and your gang have done for me. Utterly.

SIR ANTHONY. You are making things impossible for me by your rudeness.

MALLABY. Then get to hell out of here.

SIR ANTHONY. Look here, Mallaby, sit down in that chair and don't be a fool. I am not going to get angry with you—I never get angry with sick men, and you are obviously ill. Sit down at once when I tell you.

[MALLABY *sits down. He is very weak, and* SIR ANTHONY *is used to obedience.*

Now, listen to me. In the first place, I want you to forgive your wife.

MALLABY. Will you kindly not interfere any more in my business?

SIR ANTHONY. I have brought her here with me. She is here now. She has played the fool and is sorry for it. She left Burmeister at Nuremberg. Made some excuse and left him at the luncheon-table. She arrived at my house early this morning. She was afraid to come back to you.

MALLABY. She's a coward as well as a rat.

SIR ANTHONY. Mallaby, she is tired and ill. You must pull yourself together and look after her.

MALLABY. Look after her! The only crumb of comfort I had in the whole ghastly, miserable business was that she was well provided for and living her own life in her own way. Enjoying herself as well as anyone in this pestilential ditch of a world ever can. Now, you stupid old woman, you've brought her back to—this! Why don't you keep her yourself?

SIR ANTHONY. Really, Mallaby!

MALLABY. Splendid! You're blushing! Blush on, coy Mr. President of the British Academy of Medicine. Blush on!

SIR ANTHONY. You are facetious in the filthiest taste.

MALLABY. Bad taste! It is the last consolation of the heretic. Except whisky. Will you have a drink?

SIR ANTHONY. No, thank you. In no circumstances will I drink with you, you mangy little cowardly hound.

MALLABY. Don't get angry. You said you wouldn't get angry. Why do you say I'm a coward?

SIR ANTHONY. You're a coward because you try to drug yourself out of your responsibilities, and you're a fool because you think you can.

MALLABY. Don't scold me. I don't think I can bear it. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. I'll cry, I think.

[*He does so.* MRS. MALLABY *appears at the door.*

MRS. MALLABY. May I come in?

SIR ANTHONY. Yes, yes. Come along.

MRS. MALLABY (*running to her husband*). Oh, poor old thing! Did he now? What is it, sweetheart? Is his heart broken?

MALLABY. Yes, Dolly, I suppose it is. Why did you leave me, Dolly?

MRS. MALLABY. Ah! Why, why?

MALLABY. I've been very unhappy since you left. I've been drinking like a fish. I'd have been over the Devil's Leap if it hadn't been for your Aunt Dinah.

MRS. MALLABY. My poor love!

MALLABY. I've properly made a mess of things, Dolly. Can you forgive me?

MRS. MALLABY. Forgive you! And I left you in your greatest need.

MALLABY. We've both been pretty feeble, haven't we?

MRS. MALLABY. Not you! Not you! You've been splendid.

MALLABY. Oh, the splendour! (*He pauses and stares at nothing, then laughs.*) It's an odd situation. By gum, it's an odd situation! Like a dream. I don't know what to do. I'd *like* to go and shoot the old Jew. I ought to, perhaps. I suppose a true gentleman would.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, George, please, please . . .

MALLABY. Don't speak, Dolly. I'm trying to get hold of things. You see, there's something. . . . I don't know why it is, but just at the moment you seem to me so . . . so damned irrevelant.

MRS. MALLABY. I irrelevant?! [AUNT DINAH *comes in.*

AUNT DINAH. Is that all right, George?

MALLABY. Is what all right?

AUNT DINAH. That. That word. I always used to call it "irrevelant" and so did all our family.

MALLABY. That was only their blasted ignorance. Oh,

God! My head! . . . Don't leave me now, Dolly. You won't leave me now? You'll stay with me?

[SIR ANTHONY *is retiring discreetly.*

MRS. MALLABY. Of course, of course I will.

MALLABY. Where are you going?

SIR ANTHONY. Well . . .

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, listen, George. Do you know what Sir Anthony is going to do?

MALLABY (*hardening*). No.

MRS. MALLABY. May I tell him, Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. As you please.

MRS. MALLABY. Well, it seems that a great many of the Academy people were very much impressed by your work, although it had a—what was it——?

SIR ANTHONY. A capital mistake at the outset of the argument.

MRS. MALLABY. Sir Anthony says some big pathologists have spoken very highly of it. Said it was very ingenious, and so on. Well, Sir Anthony has spoken to one of them, a professor, and he says he would like you to come and work in his laboratory for a bit.

SIR ANTHONY. Horrocks of Birmingham. You won't need a qualification. And he'll put all his staff at your disposal . . .

MRS. MALLABY. And you can apply to get back on the Register after a year.

SIR ANTHONY. I need not say, Mallaby, that the events of the past few months have been very painful to me. We could take no other course than the one we took. You had been injudicious. Criminally injudicious. I have every confidence that the—um—discipline of your period of probation will make a new man of you. I feel sure that in time you will reach an eminence in your profession to which I have never aspired. I——

MALLABY. No.

SIR ANTHONY. What?

MALLABY. No. No. No.

MRS. MALLABY. But think, darling, think!

MALLABY. What do you know about thinking? I've decided.

MRS. MALLABY. But, Georgie. . . . What are you going to *do?* What are you going to do?

MALLABY. Do? (*A roll of thunder is heard. The stage darkens.*) By gum! Do you hear the thunder? Lightning. See how it lights up that map. Listen. Sit down. I'll tell you what I'm going to do.

[*He looks like an augur. The thunderstorm grows rapidly to full height.* MALLABY *begins slowly and haltingly, but is swept later into something like eloquence by whisky and emotion.*

Mankind has many inventions, but only three ways of happiness—Make-believe, Curiosity and Irony. The first two ways I have travelled hopefully on aching feet. They are finished. I'll see what is in the third. (*Thunder rumbles.*) Craye, you've cast me out of your civilisation and found a niche for me again in it. I can see your civilisation piled terrace on terrace, gallery on gallery, with the dumb, carved figures of the damned writhing round its pedestal. Up and up and up it goes to the clouds, where you and Pascal and Burmeister walk in state with the other priests and pedants and princes and judges and moneylenders and magicians. You walk very proudly in the scarlet gowns the Universities gave you for your importance and magnificence and your usefulness. You made this monument, you made this memorial, pulling out here and pushing in there, this man's life-work and that woman's pain. You laid the lash on the backs of the slaves till it grew and grew. Beautiful. Immense. Almost perfect. A little more, a little arranging, a few more tired men's lives worked into the arabesque and the thing will be complete. Oh, a tower, a palace, a world fit for surgeons and financiers and newspaper proprietors to live in!

[*A flash. Closer thunder.*

AUNT DINAH. Good, George, good. That's the stuff to give 'em.

MALLABY. Eternal towers? O Memphis, Mycenae, Babylon, Thebes! Carthage, Nineveh, Tyre! Palmyra! Jackals howl there, and the dust blows there, and the clever ones and all they did are nothing and less than nothing. O cities, I'll go to you. I'll fill my soul with you! You know, you cities, how soon, in how little time our little, shoddy, concrete and stucco world will be bitten to death by bacteria, shrouded in jungle and burnt there by the sun. Craye, Craye, Craye, do you remember Ozymandias, King of Kings? A clever one in such a little time will read on a broken statue—"I was John Snook, three times Mayor of Puddlechook-in-the-Mud. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair." That will be all, all. Where will be then Sir Anthony Craye and his doom-dealing Academy and his epoch-making book on the Mesenteries? A broken bit of delft from a Harley Street lavatory. "By George, they had sanitation of a sort then, too?"

SIR ANTHONY. You're beside yourself. What are you talking about? Do pull yourself together.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, George dearest, be practical for once in your life.

MALLABY. I'm being practical. Is it being practical to lock a chain round my leg and limp up old Craye's treadmill? What for? To grind out a few false proofs to bolster up the ephemeral superstitions of these pundits, his friends? I'm damned if it is. I'm damned if I will. The only practical things are life and eternity. I'll go where they've written their message on the old grey face of the world. I'm free, I tell you. Free. The bonds of my captivity are broken. I'll go now. As fast as I can.

AUNT DINAH. Me, too. I'll come too.

MALLABY. If you like.

AUNT DINAH. Oh, rapture and rapturousness.

SIR ANTHONY. You're mad.

MALLABY. I'm as mad as a thunderstorm, but I know what I'm about. I'll go to Palmyra. There's a place! All groves and fountains and clever ones disputing about the best advice

to give to the Almighty. The mosquitoes bred in their lily pools and bit malaria into their blood. And their glossy skins yellowed and dried, and their eyes grew dull, and their brain shrivelled, and their spleens grew, and their palaces and their cisterns crumbled away. And their laws and opinions and pronouncements and edicts and discoveries were lost among the thin air. I'll dig up the petty cash and casseroles of the clever ones—all dead, dead, dead, and forgotten. I'll dig in Palmyra!

MRS. MALLABY. But what about me? For Heaven's sake, George! And what am I to do?

MALLABY. How should I know? What does a woman do? Wait, I suppose, and live a minute at a time.

[MRS. MALLABY *begins to cry silently*.

MRS. MALLABY. But Sir Anthony is waiting to hear what you've got to say to his proposal.

MALLABY. Sir Anthony. Ha!! . . .

SIR ANTHONY. I quite understand. You are excited. If you shoulder your responsibilities, I have not the least doubt . . .

MALLABY. I will shoulder *nothing*. Responsibilities! I have had enough of that sort of responsibility.

SIR ANTHONY. Then you . . .

MALLABY. I'm not going to work in Horrocks' Laboratory nor in any laboratory.

SIR ANTHONY. But think, man, think.

MALLABY. That's what I mean to do. For the rest of my life I'll be hired slave no more to the sick and silly.

SIR ANTHONY. I don't understand you.

MALLABY. No, of course you don't.

MRS. MALLABY. George!

MALLABY. Shut up, dear. You're a tame elephant, proud of its little procession. I know what *you* want. Honour and glory, the consciousness of work well done, respect—"to give your little senate laws and stand attentive to your own applause"—all that. I don't. Pascal wants brute power. I don't. Your friend, what's-his-name—Burmeister, wants money and all the piggish pleasures it can bring. I don't.

I'm an altruist. I only want the kingdom of heaven. It is within me, and, by heaven, I'll be king of it!

SIR ANTHONY. This is hysteria. Will you be serious?

MALLABY. Serious?

SIR ANTHONY. Yes, if you can. You had ambition once. You still have, I'm sure. You have the stuff in you. We are giving you a chance to come back—perhaps eventually (who knows?) to take your place alongside Lister, Jenner, Hunter, Harvey.

AUNT DINAH. Peter Davey.

MALLABY. Dan'l Whiddon.

AUNT DINAH. Harry Hawke.

MALLABY. Old Uncle Tom Cobley and all.

SIR ANTHONY. This is absolutely intolerable. I shall go back to the inn. Will you be good enough to telephone when you are sober enough to receive me—if ever you are?

MALLABY. I am sober enough. Look here, Sir Anthony. I don't care two hoots what you think of me. It wouldn't even amuse me to know. But I am sorry for playing the goat just now.

AUNT DINAH. Now, that is what I would call one of the handsomest apologies in the whole world.

MALLABY. Shut up . . . (AUNT DINAH *sails out of the room in high dudgeon.*) I was a little—a little raised. And you've been so snowed under with pomposities and stupidities all your life that you can't be expected to understand. But I'm not drunk—now. And I'm not mad. You must take my word for it.

SIR ANTHONY. I really must say . . .

MALLABY. No, you mustn't. There is nothing you can say, usefully.

MRS. MALLABY. Georgie! Georgie! Don't you see how splendid Sir Anthony has been?

MALLABY. Well, he has certainly stood up very sturdily in a dangerous situation. . . . I say, look here, old boy . . .

SIR ANTHONY. Mrs. Mallaby, the car is waiting. I shall

be happy to escort you to—to any friends you may happen to have in the neighbourhood.

MRS. MALLABY. But I've no friends! Not now! And I haven't heard whether George is going to—going to——

SIR ANTHONY. Great Heavens! You're not going back to him now! The house is filthy. The man is raving. He's on the edge of delirium tremens.

MRS. MALLABY. Well, if he is it's my fault. And yours too. You should have given his theory a fair trial.

SIR ANTHONY. Mrs. Mallaby. Really I . . . May I remind you that I have been doing my quite supererogatory best for you and your husband for the last twenty-four hours . . . and that my time, at least, is not without value?

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, Sir Anthony, we're beasts! But everything is so muddled and unexpected . . .

SIR ANTHONY. Quite, quite. You are naturally upset. Now, come with me.

MALLABY. Ha! And he was all virtuous indignation a moment ago when I . . .

MRS. MALLABY (*furiously*). George! How dare you! (*To* CRAYE.) Sir Anthony, it's dear of you, but you see how it is. I must take charge here. It's my job. I can't shirk it again.

SIR ANTHONY. But is it safe? I can't leave you like this. He—they—anything might happen.

MALLABY. I'm not going to beat her, if that's what you mean, Crayfish.

SIR ANTHONY. I shouldn't be surprised if you did.

MALLABY. Look here, you old toad! . . .

MRS. MALLABY. Be quiet! Sir Anthony, I really think you had better go. Honestly. He's been like this before. I can manage him. You are only making him worse. I'll write to you. We're terribly grateful. Honestly we are. . . . We'll never forget what you've done. But do go, now.

SIR ANTHONY. Very well. You are a brave woman. And do remember, in spite of everything that has passed, if I can be of any service . . .

AUNT DINAH (*appearing at the door*). You should learn to

cut these things off short, old doctor. One hard handshake, lingering and fingering for a little like jingering, one ardent look, two misty eyes, then out into the night.

SIR ANTHONY. Be quiet. Good-night.

[*He goes out. The others stare after him.*

MRS. MALLABY. Whatever in the world will he think? George, darling, if you're sober enough, see him to his car.

MALLABY. Oh, I'm not drunk. Poor old boy! He shouldn't have barged into my splendid realisations. Righto. I'll go. [*He follows* SIR ANTHONY.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, Aunt Dinah, what is to become of us now? I couldn't say a word. I'm terrified by thunderstorms. What is to become of us?

AUNT DINAH. I think you might have thought of what is to become of us before.

MRS. MALLABY. But George has changed so!

AUNT DINAH. Yes. Isn't he rich and strange?

MRS. MALLABY. But what will he do? Has he any plans?

AUNT DINAH. Millions. He's going to Palmyra.

MRS. MALLABY. Where in the world's that?

AUNT DINAH. There (*points to the map*). Doesn't it look sweet?

MRS. MALLABY. It looks absolutely awful! Hundreds of miles from anywhere. Aunt Dinah—is he—is he all right in his mind? Is he—is he—unhinged or anything?

AUNT DINAH. How can I tell? I've been off my hinges for years. All I know is, he'll go. I'll see that he goes. (MALLABY *re-enters.*) Here you are, George. All a-blowing and a-growing. You explain to Dolly. I'm too busy. I've got to pack—your things, George. Mine are packed already, as you know.

MALLABY. All right, you old gargoyle. [*She skips out.* He wouldn't speak to me. Poor old tame elephant—so proud of his procession! . . . I say, have some tea. No. I'm afraid I've upset that too. I'll ring.

MRS. MALLABY. No, don't ring. It's quite warm. I

don't care what I drink. I don't suppose I deserve anything really.

MALLABY. No, I don't suppose you do.

MRS. MALLABY. That's perhaps not very kind, do you think?

MALLABY. What? What I said just now? Good Lord, I haven't been sitting here all this time thinking out compliments for you!

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, darling, darling! What have I done to you?

MALLABY. Done to me? My dear girl, don't bother your head about that. You had the darned good sense to think of yourself first and break for the open. You were quite right.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, what an utterly dreadful thing to say! Darling, you must listen. I've simply got to tell you everything or you'll never understand. Everything!

MALLABY. No, no, no. I couldn't stand that. I'm not emancipated enough for that yet. No. Dolly, you had the pluck to escape first, but you did it all wrong. I'm glad you've come back. I'll show you how to escape properly. We'll do it together.

MRS. MALLABY. George. You don't mean—suicide?

MALLABY. Suicide? Whatever for? We're just beginning life!

MRS. MALLABY. But where?

MALLABY. Palmyra.

MRS. MALLABY. But why Palmyra? Palmyra's in the desert, isn't it? There'll be nobody to talk to.

MALLABY. There'll be generation after generation to talk to. Dead men tell no tales? What rot! Dead men do nothing else but tell tales all day long and all night long. Ironic tales.

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, George darling, in a howling desert? How beastly!

MALLABY. No, it won't be beastly. We'll take along a loaf of bread and a book of songs.

MRS. MALLABY. But, George, aren't you tying yourself up again?

MALLABY. Eh? No, I don't think so. No! The desert—space. "The burnished sword of God before them blazed fierce as a comet." Who said that? I know—"Paradise Lost." Don't be afraid, Dolly, it will be all right now. Even my work won't be lost. Nothing a man does with his whole soul is ever lost.

MRS. MALLABY. Then you'll come back again? You'll go on with your work?

MALLABY. Who knows? Perhaps our children——

MRS. MALLABY. Oh, my dear——

MALLABY. "The world was all before them where to choose their place of rest, and, Providence their guide, they hand-in-hand with wandering steps and slow through Eden took their solitary way."

(*He looks round the wreck of the room, catches her eye, chuckles and repeats "Eden."*)

CURTAIN

THE PARDONER'S TALE

A MORALITY

ADAPTED FROM

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

TO JAMES COMBE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

AN OLD INNKEEPER.

DUNCAN ELLIOT
HANDASYDE GRANT
PHILIP MACGILLIVRAY } *Three second-rate bucks from Edinburgh.*

SCENE: A Changehouse on the Perth Road. Night.
TIME: Early Eighteenth Century.

THE PARDONER'S TALE

The Scene is a dilapidated Changehouse between Edinburgh and Perth. The time is early in the eighteenth century. It is winter. The room has two doors; one at the back opening on the road and another, R., leading to the tap. The wainscoting has fallen from the bare walls years ago, and the furniture is a table, a window-seat below a mullioned window, some of whose panes have been broken and stuffed with rags, and two or three rickety chairs of different periods. There is a fine chimney-piece in bad repair, and in front of a poor log fire there sits an old man, thinking. The room is lit by a storm lantern, but candles are standing ready.

The OLD MAN *gets up, pulls a green log from under the window-seat, and mends the fire. As he does so the noise of beating on the door is heard. He opens the door, after lighting his candles, and three horsemen with snow on their cloaks fall out of the darkness.*

FIRST HORSEMAN. Cock's body, it's cold! Saint Judas Iscariot, what a house you keep! Where's the ostler?

OLD MAN. I am ostler and chambermaid and host in this house these two years, sir.

FIRST HORSEMAN. Hell's guts, and do ye tell me that? Blast my eyes, on a nicht that would freeze the liver out of Beelzebub to stumble on a damned charnel house the like of this! See the horses stabled then, and back with you like the hammers of Hell with a stoup of aquavitae. Run, or I'll cut the spine out of ye!

OLD MAN. Speedily, sir, speedily.

[*He goes out. The horseman flings off his cloak. The second rider reels to the fireside and sits down. The third sits on the window-seat and buries his head in*

his hands. All three horsemen are dressed like gentlemen. The first two are briefless advocates, the third a student. The first is a big red-headed fellow, DUNCAN ELLIOT, *a bully, the soberest but noisiest of the party. The second,* HANDASYDE GRANT, *is a little blackavised man, all tipsy ingratiatingness but with a cur's bite below his cringing. The third,* PHILIP MACGILLIVRAY, *is the only decent-looking fellow of the lot—a debauched Galahad, fair-headed, with a Highland accent and the remnants of a Highland gentility. He is sick and nearly exhausted.* ELLIOT *sings in a loud brutal voice, beating time on the table with his riding-crop.*

ELLIOT. It's Geordie he sat down to dine
And wha came in but Madame Swine;
Grump, grump, quo' she, I'm come in time.
I'll sit and dine wi' Geordie!
The sow's tail is till him yet,
The sow's birse will kill him yet. . . .

GRANT. In the name of God, man! Stop. Stop. Stop. Do you want us all hangit?

ELLIOT. Hangit, by Satan! . . . "The sow's tail is till him yet . . ."

GRANT. Now, Mr. Elliot. Now, Dunny, now. Now, now, now. There's songs that's decent among gentlemen, and there's songs that give offence, in a way of speaking, if ye see what I mean. You ken I'm a loyal subject. And you ken you're a loyal subject. And Philip's loyal subject, too. All loyal subjects King Geordie. Now, I say nothing against you. You're my friend. Very well then, you say nothing against Geordie. That's fair speaking. Forbye you're making the poor young doctor sick.

ELLIOT. Cock's body, I forgot about him. How is it with you, my poor wee yaud?

PHILIP. Let me alone.

GRANT. Let me alone! There's a hearty good

fellow for you! There's the life and soul of the festive round! Whae ordered the horses, now, and led us hell-for-leather out the Perth road on a nicht as black as a sewer and nuthing to snaw?

ELLIOT. And the claret dirling fine and the doxies growing kinder every minute. Gog's wounds, I never saw a man whose guts led his heid such a dance. What for did you do it?

PHILIP. Oh, that hot room, and the hot claret and the hot wenches! And poor Andrew out there cold and coffined in the frost. I couldna, man, I couldna. I needed the wind in my face. Poor Andrew!

GRANT (*shaking his head in maudlin solemnity*). A good lad was Andy. A good lad.

ELLIOT. Aye, and hotter at this minute than you and I above ground in this blasted, rotting, forfochen midden of a changehouse. Curse my lungs, what a drab's kitchen! Where's auld St. Patey wi' the aquavitae?

PHILIP. He was a bonny singer, was Andy. (*He weeps.*)

GRANT. He was good company. The best of the whole boiling of us. I wonder, Duncan, you have the heart to flyte.

ELLIOT. By St. Paul's Breeks, and isna flyting the only thing? There's poor Andra, a fine, swearing, randan, lechering, drinking, guttling young bully-be-damned it did your heart good to see ruffling down the Canongate wi' the beaver of him cockit. None of your pinched Psalmists, yon. Full of blood, the boy was. And Death comes creeping up behind him and grips him by the thrapple in his cups. Andrew, no less. Nae snivelling Whig like Sneckie, here. But a bull of a lad wi' forty years hard boozing and fornicketting before him. What can we do but flyte?

[*The* OLD MAN *has come through the door of the tap with brandy and glasses. He puts them on the table while* ELLIOT *is speaking.*

PHILIP. Lord in Heaven, see me some of yon!

[*He reels to the table and pours himself a drink. The others drink too, and do honour to his toast. They become quieter and steadier. The effect is most pronounced on* PHILIP, *but there is madness in his eyes.*

Death, boys, Death? Here's damnation to Death! . . . You don't honour the toast, Mister Innkeeper?

OLD MAN. No. . . . No. Death is a coarse companion, but he sees you home, and aye pays your lawing.

PHILIP. Damn your companion! D'ye hear? My mother was a bonny lady, and Death bloated her like a drooned dog and took her away raving like a fishwife. My father was a kind man, who prayed each night for Death to take him in a glen with four or five Whigamores at his claymore's point. The false thief, Death, chokit him with a bloody flux in a strange wife's house in Amiens. Lily-white maids and wee croodling weans that never did harm to any, the foul butcher clutches and slays and rots awa their bright beauty. And he's cut in twa the heart of the best friend I ever had. . . . (*He drinks again.*) You're old. The old ken Death. Day by day they see him face to face. Show me Death, you wizened dog. Show me Death. I've twathree accounts to settle with him. (*He draws his hanger.*)

OLD MAN. Keep your hands off me, young sir. I'm over old to be feared.

[PHILIP *has shot his bolt for a while. He staggers and almost falls. The* OLD MAN *leads him to the fireside chair, takes off his cloak and spreads it over his knees. The other two look at them, pulling heavily at the brandy. The* OLD MAN *goes to the window-seat and sits down. A pause.*

ELLIOT (*with a hoarse laugh*). Faith, there's a ploy

for you! Hunting Death! There's a kittle bit fox now.

PHILIP. Death's a man. There's nothing else in earth or sky could be so bitter bad.

GRANT. That's true. That's a true word you say, Philip MacGillivray. There's them that have seen him, though there's few see him and live. An old grey man, they say . . . like yon. (*He point with the bottle at the* OLD MAN.)

ELLIOT. Hey! You'll no be Death, then, Methusalem?

OLD MAN. No. Oh, no.

ELLIOT. Are you acquaint with him, then?

OLD MAN. No, to my sorrow. The long days I've walked the world, restlessly, seeking him! But he will not have my life. He will not have my life. Do you ken the verse, you three scholars?

> Thus walk I like a restless caitiff wight
> And on the ground which is my mother's gate
> So knock I with my staff, early and late,
> And call to her, "Love, Mother, let me in!
> Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin!
> Alas! When shall my body be at rest?"

Gentlemen, you're young. There are happier ways than the gate you have chosen. And for the nicht there is poor cheer for you between these walls. I rede you go home to your beds and pray. And God be with you. (*He gets up and walks towards the door of the tap.*)

GRANT. A-men. Here endeth the lesson.

[PHILIP *springs up in another gust of passion and gets between the* OLD MAN *and the door.*

PHILIP. No, nor ends! Are you thinking to turn us back with your sly soft words. Do you think that we are drunk? You wear the white crest of Death on your head. You're in league with him against all youth. Show us our enemy!

ELLIOT (*rising*). Aye, by the Black Plague! There's a fight worth fighting, now. We three against Death and the Deil tak' the chicken-guts! Show us Death, Gaffer, or we'll clap your hurdies on your ain bit fire. You'll burn like parchment, cock's body!

OLD MAN. Sit ye down, gentlemen. Wild words are like the wind in the chimney to me. I'm old, ye understand. Sit down. I'll tell ye a thing about Death.

GRANT. Pray, silence for Methusalem. Methusalem's going to give us a bawr. A wee bit bawdy in it, Methusalem. Haud your peace, Mr. Elliot, for Methusalem's bawr. Sit down, Doctor MacGillivray, if you're nae better at standing than that. The court is open.

OLD MAN. Death's in this room. . . . (*A pause.*) I had this house from the heirs of Alec Bain; and Alec Bain was found deid in this room with his heid in the ashes. There. His elder brother, Big John, was pistolled by a highwayman in that chair you sit in. They were taking a dram thegether. Their father, Archibald of the Carse, hanged himsel' from yon beam. Auld Archie, the great uncle, who built the place long syne, died in yon chair too, and it is said the Devil took his saul. He hid a peck of siller some place, but it was never found, and it has been an ill job seeking it. It was seeking it that the Bains died. Every man . . .

And now, gentlemen, I canna refuse you shelter. I have nae beds but my ain, and I'll betake mysel' there now. The logs are under the settle. God be with you, young gentlemen. (*He goes, taking the lamp with him and closing the door of the tap behind him.*)

PHILIP. If Death should be in this room!

ELLIOT. I'm thinking there's a hantle mair in this room than auld Blood and Banes. Watch the door, Sneckie, and hit the auld carlin on the heid if he comes back. Did ye lippen tae his story?

GRANT (*glass in hand at the taproom door*). Me? I heard nae shtory. Just an auld ballant to nae tune.

ELLIOT (*examining the chimney-piece*). Stash your gab. . . .

So Death came for the Bains at their ain fireside. Now, was not that a droll place for Death to come for the Bains? At their ain fireside. And is't no a droll fireside for the Bains to be at when Death came sleeking in at their backsides? And is Death no the sly old dog to come aye to the same fireside to drench his gab in blood? Aye the same fireside. Cock's body, there are mair things in heaven and earth. . . . And a gey queer bit bastard o' a fireside. Master Philip, did they teach ye architecture at the Coallege of Edinburgh? Nay, hogswounds. Naething so useful. Wining and wenching, they teach you at the Coallege in Edinburgh. Have ye found Death yet, Philip, Adonis, Æsculapius, my sweetheart? Ye're a great wee cocksparrow to be ruffling wi' Death. Mors, pallida mors. Atch! Come oot, ye besom! And there's the reason what wey Death came for the Bains at their ain fireside! (*He has levered out a large stone with his dagger. He drags a heavy ironbound box from the cavity.*) Ay, by Calvary, a droll place for Death to come for the Bains! (*He crouches on the floor forcing the lock of the box.*)

PHILIP. Duncan! How did you ken of this?

ELLIOT. Have I been so long time with you and yet thou hast not known me, Philip? Ratiocination, Philip. Besides I've a keen nose for the siller. . . . Charlies, by Satan. In bags. There's the bonny, poxy phiz of old Rowley. Yellow wi' the jaundice. Gold, Whig, gold! Cock your snout, Whig! Now comes in the sweet o' the night.

[GRANT *joins the group, his eyes starting out of his head.*

ELLIOT. Look now. Away you, Philip, and saddle the beasts, if your unruly members will tak' you that far. We maun be at the Port of Leith by cock-crow. Haste ye, man. Sneckie and me'll burn the papers and

dispose the bags about us. Then we'll settle wi' auld Methusalem. What was his word? "Death aye pays the lawing." He'll pay it well this night, mine host! Haste ye, Philip.

[PHILIP *goes out to the road, leaving the door half-open.*

ELLIOT. Look you, Sneckie. Yon lad's owre unchancy ballast for the course we're setting. When he comes back I'll put twa bags in his hands and you'll come on him behind and put a knife between his ribs. Are ye sober enough?

GRANT. Ay, I'm sober.

ELLIOT. Then ye'll do it?

GRANT. Ay, I'll do it.

ELLIOT. Then we'll awa ben and let out the auld runt's life before he wakes. You're sure ye ken what to do?

GRANT. Ay, I ken.

ELLIOT. You heard his talk, the night? He's no companion for a gentleman of fortune. I'd leifer have the hangman. "Show him Death!" Set him up. He's owre long in the tongue. Come.

[*They go into the taproom.* PHILIP *comes in. He has been hiding behind the door. He is rubbing a handful of snow on his shoulders and face. He is in a foggy, vicious state of drunkenness, but moderately steady in his movements.*

PHILIP. So. So, my gentlemen. There's friendship! The knife. I heard ye. I heard ye. You'd murder me, you think, you Deil's bitches. Wait. Wait. Bide a wee while. They teach you other matters than wining and wenching in Edinburgh College, Mr. Duncan Elliot. Where have I it now? Ah, here. Ah, here! Death! Here's Death in a wee box. There you lie, Atropos, the beautiful lady, drown yourself in the brandy. (*He pours the contents of the box into the half-finished glasses of the two murderers.*)

PHILIP. Oh, wait you, now, Duncan Elliot, my learned brother. It's the great drinker of spirits you are, certainly, and the fine boastful man of his potations. We'll see how you like the deadly nightshade. The deadly nightshade. . . . Saddle the beasts, says you, Philip MacGillivray, you bloody stableboy! That'll warm your heart, Duncan, for the long ride to the Port of Leith. Ha, ha, ha! It's a bonny port, the Port of Leith!

[*The murderers re-enter.* ELLIOT *wipes his dagger on the table-cloth. Neither can keep his eyes off* PHILIP, *and neither can meet his eye.*

ELLIOT. You are very joco.

PHILIP. I'm fine. I'm a man again. Let us drink. Let us drink to Death. Good old Death! Come. Drink. Drink to Death.

[*He goes to the table and fills up glasses for* ELLIOT *and* GRANT. *He is about to take them up when* ELLIOT *grips his wrists and pins them to the table.*

ELLIOT. Now, Sneckie.

[GRANT *stabs* PHILIP *under the left armpit.* PHILIP *makes no sound, but drags himself free from* ELLIOT *and falls forward into the fireplace.*

ELLIOT. Tchach. What butcher's work. That was well struck, Sneckie. He never gied a grunt. Come. A deoch an doris, and we'll bundle and go.

GRANT. Goad! I need it too. Save us all, what a fine like end to an ambrosial nicht!

[*They stand at opposite sides of the table and drink in great gulps. Suddenly they put down their glasses and look at each other with fear in their eyes.*

CURTAIN.

THE SUNLIGHT SONATA

OR

TO MEET THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

A FARCE-MORALITY

IN

A PROLOGUE, AN INTERLUDE, A DEMONSTRATION, AN APOTHEOSIS AND AN EPILOGUE

TO TYRONE GUTHRIE

Produced on March 20th, 1928, by the Scottish National Players in the Lyric Theatre, Glasgow, with the following Cast:

GROUNDWATER	Morland Graham.
MRS. GROUNDWATER	Elliot Mason.
HAMISH	George Yuill.
PETTIGREW	Halbert Tatlock.
CARMICHAEL	Graham Dow.
MRS. CARMICHAEL	Meg Buchanan
ELSIE	Esther Wilson.
BEELZEBUB	James Anderson.
SUPERBIA	Peggy Morton.
INVIDIA	Ethel Lewis.
IRA	Frankie Smith.
ACCIDIA	Jean Taylor Smith.
AVARICIA	T. P. Maley.
GULA	Caven Watson.
LUXURIA	Elsie Brotchie.
FAITH	Nan Scott.
HOPE	Jenny Miller.
CHARITY	Nell Ballantyne.

The Play was produced by Tyrone Guthrie. The Costumes were designed by Ethel Lewis.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MARCUS GROUNDWATER, C.B.E., D.L., J.P. .	A builder.
MAGGIE GROUNDWATER	His wife.
2ND-LT. HAMISH HECTOR MATHIESON GROUNDWATER	Their son.
MATTHEW PETTIGREW	An artist.
THE REV. SOMERLED CARMICHAEL, B.D., B.LITT.	A clergyman.
MRS. CARMICHAEL.	
ELSIE CARMICHAEL	Their daughter.

BEELZEBUB.
SUPERBIA.
INVIDIA.
IRA.
ACCIDIA.
AVARICIA.
GULA.
LUXURIA.

FAITH.
HOPE.
CHARITY.

PHŒBUS APOLLO
(who does not appear in person).

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

GROUNDWATER : Æt. 54. Well-dressed, round, chubby, and hard, but not incapable of sentiment. An elder in Carmichael's church, (*a*) because it is good for trade, (*b*) because he is afraid of God. He has an educated Glasgow accent, and speaks broadly when he is angry or trying to be funny.

MRS. GROUNDWATER : Æt. 30 ? 40 ? 50 ? A gross, over-dressed, over-eating blonde. A great patron of beauty parlours and restaurants.

HAMISH : A perfect little gentleman. Æt. 21. Beautifully dressed. Easily polite. Fettes, Sandhurst, and the Highland Light Infantry. His parents are proud and a little afraid of him.

PETTIGREW : Æt. 35. A sulky oaf of a painter. Long dark hair. Blue chin. Pink collar. Peacock blue tie. Light old Harris tweeds. Chain smoker. Groundwater is his Mæcenas and is getting a little impatient at the slowness with which Pettigrew fulfils his contracts.

CARMICHAEL : Æt. 40. Light grey suit and clerical collar. A big, handsome man with a powerful voice. His manner is reserved and suggests that he is well aware that he looks and sounds rather magnificent.

MRS. CARMICHAEL : Æt. 38. Ill-dressed, bleach-haired. Nervously quick in her talk and movements. Has the air of a drudge, but there is more than a suspicion that this is principally histrionic.

ELSIE : Æt. 19. A pretty girl. Plays tennis very well, golf fairly well, and dances superlatively well when she gets the chance. Dressed by a good tailor. An atheist in religion. Her parents obviously get on what nerves she has.

THE THREE GRACES : The Graces are three handsome but uneventful Pantomime Fairy Queens. On the top of Charity's wand is a tiny telephone. On the top of Faith's a miniature barometer. On the top of Hope's—a Star.

BEELZEBUB : Six feet high. Bald. He wears little horns like Emil Jannings' in the Faust film. His face is painted bright blue, but apart from this his face is that of a lovable old gentleman inclining to embonpoint. He speaks the Doric. He wears a long black cloak with a green lining, green sleeves with pointed white cuffs turned back over his knuckles, black kid gloves, and a dark blue doublet and hose. He carries his tail over his arm.

SUPERBIA : All the Sins are as small as possible, but Superbia is the tallest of them. She is thin and ivory pale. She wears a black velvet hunting-dress springing into an arum lily collar, hawking gloves, spurred scarlet boots, a purple passion flower over one pointed ear, and a long Pompadour cane.

IRA : Is dressed in rags of every shade of red from magenta to vermilion. Her hair is red and she has a pale face and black devil eyebrows. A dagger is in her belt. Her legs are bare and scratched, and she has hairy brogues on her feet.

ACCIDIA : A slut in dusky blue rags, tangled neutral-coloured hair and jade earrings. Her expression is woebegone, and she must indicate sullenness as well as sloth.

AVARICIA : Is a male. He is the conventional miser, but young, elfish and sprightly. Yellow tunic and brown stockings. Pale hair, little horns, a tiny peaked chin beard and a peaked face. His nose is bright scarlet. He jingles as he walks.

GULA : Also a male. Falstaff as a boy. He wears a mask representing a sensual expressionless face. His Elizabethan garments have burst in places.

INVIDIA : Is the smallest of the Sins. Neatly dressed in green with an iron chain necklace. Pale face and eyes and hair.

LUXURIA : The youngest of the Sins. A baggage. She is dressed in a leopard skin and exiguous underwear, a smilax wreath, a quantity of cheap jewelry and high-heeled shoes. She is a restless, unpleasant little thing, always scratching herself or teasing Ira.

THE SUNLIGHT SONATA

PROLOGUE

Part of Glen Falloch at the head of Loch Lomond. The stage represents a flat of green turf surrounded by heather, one or two birches, and a mountain ash. A third of the stage at back L. is occupied by a sloping heath-clad platform, on top of which is a huge boulder. The back cloth is painted to represent a rugged and conventionalised Highland landscape, showing very little sky. The stage, on the rise of the curtain, is in inky darkness except for one star, high up R. When he is revealed by the lightning, BEELZEBUB *is seen to be standing on the boulder. In the darkness he is heard intoning the following hexameters in a deep baritone with an accent in which broad Ayrshire and schoolroom pedantry are nicely blended.*

BEELZEBUB. Now is the butt o' the nicht. The muckle black Bens are about me.
Dour and cauld and deid. What are the Bens to me?
Give me the bonny wee glens with the quick brown whispering water,
And Life in the burn, in the linn, by the river shadowed with cities.
Life in the muir and the wood and the clachan—flittering, fighting,
The rat and the bat and the cleg; the otter, the owl and the adder;
The lean sculduddery cat and the slaters under the ruckies;
Maggots in dead men's eye-sockets; eels in the deep cold loch;
The sweating caird and his wife and weans in bed in the bothy
Wi' the plaid well over the lugs for fear of my wise horngollochs

That peek and peer and turn and hirple and crawl in their armour
Into the ears and the nose and the eyes and into the brain-pan,
Into the very soul. . . . The thoughts. The thoughts. The thoughts.
O for the living heart of a man. What are the Bens to me?
Man. Man. Man.
You're feart o' me, you're feart o' me,
Droll wee slug wi' the shifty e'e!
Raise your praise to the Ancient of Days.
I prevent you in all your ways.
Your heavy hosannas sink to me.
To me you pray in horrible psalm
For the single eye and the grasping palm—
" Play the game, Lord, play the game.
Commit us not to the worm and the flame.
Save us from boils and leprosy,
Prosper our cheating and let us be!
Benidicamus, Domine! Amen."

[*A silence.*

It's lonely for Princes of Darkness up here in the hills.
Ye blasted sarcophagous bings! Aye, sit there silent and glower!
Where's your civility? Tell me. I'll set you to rights!
Take ye that. Take ye that. Take ye that.

[*Thunder and lightning.*

. . . Aye, weel ye may wag your pows!

[*A storm. There is a lull. A silvery burst of community giggling breaks out. The stage is lit with a baleful red glow. The* Seven Deadly Sins *are revealed crouching in the foreground.*

BEELZEBUB. Eh? What's that, what's that? I

heard laughing. . . . Is a'body there? It isna' the day nor the hour for a Sabbath of Witches.

[SUPERBIA *advances. The evil light intensifies gradually.*

SUPERBIA. Is that you, Master?

BEELZEBUB. I'm Master o' deils and hobgoblins, o' poltergeists, witches and fays. Which of the boiling are you in your duddie bit braws? Come your ways oot o' the mirklins. Walk widdershins by me. . . . Deil hain us! A vaudie bit smatchet. What name do they ca' ye?

SUPERBIA. I am the Lady Superbia. The first of the Seven Deadly Sins. Those are the others. I forget their names.

BEELZEBUB. It was you got my excellent crony, the Son of the Morning, the sack. Ye Inferiority Complex! . . . Get ower. Get oot o' my sicht.

[IRA *advances.*

Man! Here's a bit maggie-rab partan! And what's like the matter wi' you?

IRA. I'm Anger. My Christian name is Ira.

BEELZEBUB. Losh save us and a'! Whatna dirdum! Awa' and coo in the corner.

[INVIDIA *advances.*

INVIDIA. Master, I am Envy. My proper name is Invidia, but nobody thinks it worth while calling me by my proper name. I should have come before Ira. But I don't suppose you care.

BEELZEBUB. Not a rap, not a scrap, not a maik. I've a routh of your sort at hame. Awa' to your Mother's Meeting. Next. . . . Who's next yin? That's richt. Take your time!

[ACCIDIA *advances.*

ACCIDIA. I'm Accidia, you know. Sheer damned laziness and the black dog on the back and all that sort

of thing. One of the Neuroses, you know. Psychasthenia to my friends. I'm rather Slavonic, they say.

BEELZEBUB (*irrelevantly*). Of the oak-headed natives of Britain, it is said "They shall never be Slavs." But they're doing their damndest, the craturs. Move on, lassie. Don't go to sleep.

[AVARICIA *advances.*

AVARICIA. Good-morning, Master.

BEELZEBUB. Your name, then, you nippit wee spirlie. Or is that giving something away?

AVARICIA. Not at all, Master. It's Thrift, really, as a matter of fact—Avaricia in Latin.

BEELZEBUB. And how are they all in the North? Nay, you can keep your counsel and anything else you can get. And wha is this creeshy pockpud?

GULA. Gula, Master, Gula. Gutsy Gilbert. Salivating Sam. You don't happen to have a pork-pie about you, Master?

BEELZEBUB. A what?

GULA. A pig tart, Master.

[*The* Sins *murmur a protest at his cheek.*

BEELZEBUB (*looking severely at him*). Keep you your gab for engorging. And carry your belly ow're there. Yin, Twa, Three, Fower, Five, Six. It runs in my heid there were Seven.

[LUXURIA *advances.*

LUXURIA. Hello!

BEELZEBUB. What's that?

LUXURIA. Hello, Daddy!

BEELZEBUB. Daddy! In the name o'—What do they call you?

LUXURIA. Luxuria, dearie. Isn't it a pretty name? Of course they call me other names too, but I never forget that I'm a lady, whatever people say. A nasty, low, common lot they are. No education.

BEELZEBUB. Get owre wi' the lave, you randy.
You're wantin' a skelping. [*Thunder.*
BEELZEBUB. From the antres dark of Pandemonium
I come.
To throw my shadow on the roofs of men
Again.
For years are dreary in yon sulphur ditch
Of which
The LANDLORD girns in perpetuity
To me
Of all his woes. He has seen better days,
He says.
Eternal tedium; eternal doom,
And gloom.
I tell you it was getting past a joke.
I spoke
To Lucifer about it.
He said, "Oh!
Then go
And take a jaunt into the cooler air
Up there,
Report in full on everything you see
To me.
See if the Seven Deadly Ones are quite
All right,
And make the rascals demonstrate to you
A few
Small tricks. And tell me if they shirk
Their work."
And so from Hateful Pandemonium
Agog, agog to quit that dismal place,
To put you through your paces I have come.
How are my little friends the Human Race?
SUPERBIA. You'd hardly believe how proud they are.
They're proud of their accents or having a car,
Or of knowing a knight or the name of a winner,
Or of putting on hard-boiled shirts to dinner;

Or of taking a bath or of not taking beer.
There's nothing too silly or mean or queer
For the People to peacock and boast and shout
And be unbearably vain about.

IRA and INVIDIA. Oh, the fights and the fun and the fret and the fuss
Since they handed their politics over to us.

AVARICIA. All the noble and the wise
Swear by Private Enterprise.
Zaharoff and Bernard Shaw
Preach the Economic Law.
Ire and Envy run the Left;
I uphold the banner of Theft,
And my stock was never higher.

GULA and ACCIDIA. We are the end of every man's desire.
Even if they do get fat,
What of that?

LUXURIA. Oh, I'm not going to play this silly round game. I'm the best of the lot. I'm Self Expression. I'm Personality. That's what I am. I'm the only one who really interests them.

BEELZEBUB. Sins. Why have you come here, far on a ghostly moorland? Cannot you move them in dreams to murder and envy and lust? Am I to bear to the LANDLORD ill words of his profitless vessels?

SUPERBIA. We are waiting.

INVIDIA. You see, they are having a picnic up here to-morrow.

AVARICIA. Seven of them. We've marked them down. It's a sort of a competition. Seven of us. Seven of them. One each.

INVIDIA. Huh! Mathematics!

IRA. Yes, Master, and I hope you intend to see fair play. Last time——

INVIDIA. Now, Ira, don't annoy the Master.

IRA. Don't annoy him? You cringing, sneaking, evil-minded little hag, it wouldn't take much to make me lose my temper with you. [*Thunder.*

BEELZEBUB. Now. Now. Now. Now. Stay at peace, ye besoms. (*He clears his throat.*)

The world is asleep like a peerie, bumming round on its peg.
The veil'd moon trails her mantle along the shores of the ocean.
The unsleeping, uncaring stars look coldly down and behold us.
Sleep little Sins and rest for a while, poor babies of sorrow.

INVIDIA. On the spur of the moment. Yes. An impromptu. . . . Rest till the morrow.

CURTAIN.

END OF PROLOGUE.

INTERLUDE

Played before the Curtain.

Enter CHARITY. *To her* FAITH *and* HOPE.

FAITH. Why, bless my buttons, what is this I see?
Surely it can't be little Charity!
Good-morning, dearie, how are you to-day?

HOPE. I hope the nathty headache'th quite away.

CHARITY. Quite better, thanks. I took a Fairy Powder.
But what a night! The thunder growing louder,
The lightning growing nearer every minute.
It's my belief, my dears, the Devil's in it.

HOPE. That'th funny now. Thince the thtorm thtarted brewing
I've felt convinced there mutht be thomething doing.

CHARITY. Whenever an important Devil comes
I feel the rheumatism in my thumbs.
Last night I felt it—felt it something cruel.

HOPE. Do say it'th better now, my prethiouth jewel.

CHARITY. Yes, thank you. Faith, dear, what have you to say?

FAITH. I know we're going to have a lovely day.
And I remarked to Hope when you came in
That we might take the Morris for a spin
Right up to Crianlarich, just us three
And drop in to Ardlui for our tea.

CHARITY. But what about that Devil? What do you think?
I heard the waste pipe in the kitchen sink
Go horribly last night. A gurgling sound,

As if some big upheaval underground
Were going on. Do you remember, dear,
It happened last time Ashtaroth was here?
Hope, dearie, I'm alarmed. What do you say?
Is there a great big Devil on his way?
HOPE. I hope not, preciouth.
FAITH. Anyway, we'll see.
We'll all go up Lochlomonside for tea,
Since the barometer (*she consults one at the top of her magic wand*) . . . is now set fair.
I must go now. So long. I'll see you there. [*Exit.*
CHARITY. Faith! Hi! Oh, well, perhaps we'd better go,
Although she does take things for granted so.
She is a love! But listen, Hope, I doubt
To-day there'll be bad influences about.
I don't half like the portents.
HOPE. Never mind.
The wortht may come, but good remainth behind.
Thomewhere, at anyrate, the thun is shining
And every thtorm cloud has a thilver lining.
So let us hope—er—that the betht man winth.
Lithten. How are thothe darling Deadly Thinth?
CHARITY. Busy as bees, the dears. Quite happy too.
How can they realise the harm they do?
I love Luxuria. She is such a child.
Gula's good-natured. Ira's a little wild
But so straightforward. Sloth's so quiet and nice.
Superbia's a girl you look at twice.
And poor Invidia, things are hard for her.
And Avaricia's such a gatherer
And picker up of things. Oh, what a joy
To parents when they have a careful boy.
HOPE. They are a little trying now and then,
But naughty children make the finetht men.
You wait a million years or tho and thee
How abtholutely lovely they will be.

CHARITY. Of course they will. But I must go, my dear.
I'm hoping to inspire a profiteer
(Such a nice man) to give a pound or two
To help a most deserving kangaroo
Who sprained his ankle yesterday, in the Zoo.
HOPE. Tho long, love.
CHARITY. Cheery-bye bye.
HOPE. Tootleoo. [*Exeunt.*

END OF INTERLUDE.

THE DEMONSTRATION

The scene is the same as that in the Prologue, but it is bathed in sunshine. A picnic party has practically finished the eating part, and the fragments are being returned to baskets and hampers. MRS. CARMICHAEL *and* ELSIE *are packing;* MRS. GROUNDWATER *is fanning herself with a newspaper and having a sort of Indian summer of a picnic all to herself with two sandwiches and what is left of a pint of Ayala. The men have gone down to the river to wash dishes, except* PETTIGREW, *who is lying on his back in the scanty shade of the big rock.*

MRS. C. Aren't they lovely. All the hills. Do look at them!

ELSIE. Thanks. I've seen them.

MRS. C. You needn't snap my nose off, Elsie. (*Shouting to the men.*) Do hurry up with the dishes. What a time you take!

ELSIE. It's ridiculous to start packing just as soon as we have finished.

MRS. G. Especially when we haven't finished.

MRS. C. Oh, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Groundwater. You were so quiet I didn't notice. But really, I mean, it's so nice to say to yourself: "There now, that's over. We can have the rest of the afternoon to ourselves."

ELSIE. We have, anyhow.

MRS. G. Now, do you know, I don't quite agree with you, Mrs. Carmichael. I think it's so nice to sort of prolong the picnic. I mean it's so nice to see the things still lying about as if we were going on and on and on, like as if it was some beautiful dream of eternity.

MRS. C. It is easy for you to talk that way, Mrs. Groundwater. You have a rich husband, and you can

afford to take things easy. But it's very, very different for a poor parson's wife. She has to keep at it, at it all the time, and never faint by the wayside. And you've no idea what a delight it is for her to say, once in a while: "There now. The work's done."

ELSIE. Oh, I think that's all bilge, personally. What work? You go about making work for yourself; fuss, fuss, fuss all the time. You make heavy weather out of nothing.

MRS. C. Elsie darling, don't say "bilge." Mrs. Groundwater, may I have that bottle now? They come in so handy for this sort of thing and that sort of thing and little odds and ends. Are you quite finished?

MRS. G. Quite, quite, quite.
For pleasures are like poppies spread.
You pluck the fowl, its bloom is shed.
Or like the Borealis lights a tumptytum amid the storm.
Or like the snowball in the river
A moment white then melts into the liquid mass.

MRS. C. Dear me, yes. How true that is!

[BEELZEBUB *and his* Sins *appear like a row of Jacks in the Box over the summit of the rock.* Gluttony, Anger, *and* Sloth *and* Envy *are more prominent than the other three. The conversation interests them. The party is unaware of* BEELZEBUB *and his* Sins.

MRS. C. There now! That's that. Oh, those men! It will be time to go home before we have the dishes packed. Hello, Mr. Pettigrew, I thought you had gone with them.

PETTIGREW. No, I thought . . . I say, I can't help in any way, can I?

[ACCIDIA *pops round the corner of the rock and twitches anxiously at his sleeve.* IRA *makes violent signals to* ELSIE.

ELSIE. Oh, no, Mr. Pettigrew. We have almost

quite finished. But we have been tremendously bucked all through by your moral support.

[BEELZEBUB *looks bored. He is keeping a score in a little book. A certain liveliness is seen among the* Sins *as the conversation illuminates each individual characteristic.*

PETTIGREW (*sulking*). Oh, very well then. (*He lies back and stares at the sky.*)

MRS. G. Elsie dear, would you very much mind looking in my husband's attache case for the liqueur chocolates? Yes. Over there. I think they round off a little snack like this so nicely. Don't you?

[ELSIE *passes the chocolates with a sneer.*

MRS. G. (*helping herself*). Do have one, dear. Mrs. Carmichael. Please. Mr. Pettigrew. Now put them back beside me. I love liqueur chocolates . . .

The same that oft times hath
Charmed magic casements opening on a prospect of pearly seas in fairyland.

I do so love that. It's from the poem about the vintage that hath been chilled for an hour or so in the garden earth. Something about a blushful Hippopotamus. After all, there's nobody like Shelley. Are you fond of Shelley, Mrs. Carmichael?

MRS. C. I have so little time for reading, nowadays.

[CARMICHAEL, GROUNDWATER *and* HAMISH *come in carrying cups, glasses, saucers and plates.*

MARCUS. I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Carmichael, but Hamish broke one of your plates. It was a cracked one anyway, but that's no excuse for carelessness.

MRS. C. Oh, it doesn't matter really. They are cheap old things. We can't afford to pay much for crockery.

MRS. G. How very naughty of you, Hamish. Hamish,

I've been looking everywhere for the opera creams we bought at Balloch. You had them last.

HAMISH. We didn't buy them. The Padre bought them. He's got them, I expect.

MR. C. Ah, yes. So I have. Won't you have one, Mrs. Groundwater?

MRS. G. You spoil me, Mr. Carmichael. We've just been having such an interesting talk about poetry.

MR. C. How very highbrow of you, Mrs. Groundwater. I imagined that ladies talked of much more worldly matters when they laughed alone.

MRS. G. Dear me, Mrs. Carmichael, how badly you have brought him up!

MR. C. I am afraid my upbringing was complete before my wife and I ever met.

MRS. G. Isn't that awful, now. How dull for her. I made a man of Marcus, here, and enjoyed doing it. He knows we talk of other things than servants and scandal, don't we, duckums?

MARCUS. Yes. You talk about food.

MRS. G. Ho! I suppose you live on air like a seraph or something. Do tell the Minister what you said when those kidneys were underdone last Friday. Hmph! Perhaps you'd better not, and you a ruling elder! . . . But seriously, Mr. Carmichael, I think it's just dreadful how unintellectual people have become since the War. They think of nothing but dancing and amusing themselves. Don't you think the world is going to the—getting worse instead of better?

MR. C. I should be sorry to think so, Mrs. Groundwater, but there is little doubt that a gross spirit of materialism is abroad.

[*At this point* BEELZEBUB *hides a leer behind his hand, and* SUPERBIA, *who has found the scene rather tedious, sits up and takes notice.*

I should be sorry to think myself lacking in sympathy

for my fellow-creatures—I am glad to say that spiritual pride has never been one of my failings. . . .

[BEELZEBUB *and* SUPERBIA *think this is great fun and applaud him silently.*

. . . You know, Mrs. Groundwater, comprendre tout, c'est tout pardonner—to understand everything is to forgive everything. . . .

MRS. G. Thanks, I know French very well.

MR. C. I know that, but I was correcting myself. I hate lapsing into a foreign language when the homely, natural tongue will serve quite as well. It is a beastly affectation, and I have to be for ever on my guard against it. Where was I?

HAMISH. You were starting in to give the young generation a sharp telling off, Padre.

MR. C. Was I, indeed?

HAMISH. Yes, you were. Personally I don't think they're so bad.

MARCUS. What way not?

HAMISH. They're a bit full of oats and so on, but there's far more palliness nowadays and less poodle-faking and square pushing and so forth, if you know what I mean.

MARCUS. What in all the earth have poodles to do with it?

HAMISH. Oh, poodlefaking. *You* know.

MARCUS. I don't.

HAMISH. Well, I mean you can take a girl out and jazz about a bit and go home, and never any suggestion of mucking about and what not. My feeling is, it's a lot healthier.

MARCUS. Mr. Carmichael just about hit the nail on the head when he mentioned materialism. I don't mind a little fun myself so long as it's understood that there are more important things. But people nowadays have lost all sense of proportion. There's no spiritual-mindedness

about these days. Everybody's out to enjoy himself without a thought either to his business or to his immortal soul. It's fair sickening. Well. Well. What are we going to do now, eh? What are we going to do now? Let's do something. The time's getting on.

MRS. C. Now, let me think. What was that nice round game we had at the Mothers' Tea Party, Elsie?

ELSIE. Oh, round game! I wish I'd brought my knitting.

MRS. C. I wish you had, Elsie.

MRS. G. I don't see why we need do anything. I'm quite happy as I am. Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away. Oh, I believe I'm going to have a little hiccup. Mr. Carmichael, would you mind passing my vanity bag? It has some of those nice strong little peppermints in it. Thank you so much.

MRS. C. Somerled dear, I think perhaps it would be as well if you three men took the hampers to the car. Then we'd have everything shipshape and settle down to enjoy ourselves.

MARCUS (*sitting down*). Mrs. Carmichael, I've done quite enough work for one day. There's Pettigrew. He hasn't done a hand's turn. I don't see why even an artist shouldn't do a job of work now and again. If a man does not work neither shall he eat. The pastor and I will have a smoke. Pettigrew and Hamish can take the hampers. Hamish, Pettigrew, you take the hampers. You and Mrs. Carmichael thinking of taking a daunder up the glen, Maggie? (*He takes out a cigar case.*)

MRS. C. Well, what do you think, Mrs. Groundwater?

[MRS. GROUNDWATER *does not hear her.*

MARCUS. Oh, I remember, Carmichael. You always smoke a pipe. I like a good cigar myself now and again. I put these in my pocket at the Infant Health Luncheon. The Corporation do you pretty well in that way at any rate.

MRS. C. It looks as if these two men wanted to be left alone, Mrs. Groundwater.

[HAMISH *pulls the unwilling* PETTIGREW *to his feet and the two carry off the luncheon baskets, R.*

MRS. G. Have you such a thing as a cigarette, Mr. Carmichael? Oh! Oh! Oh!

MRS. C. What is the matter, dear?

MRS. G. I feel so funny and faintish.

MR. C. What is it? Can we do anything?

MARCUS. It's nothing. She has those turns often. It will pass off in a minute. Mrs. Carmichael and Elsie will oxter you down to the burn, Maggie. Rub her behind the ears with a wet handkerchief, Mrs. Carmichael. That always brings her round.

[*The two women help* MRS. GROUNDWATER *to her feet, and slowly the three go out L.*

MR. C. I do hope it's nothing serious.

MARCUS. Serious? Not a bit. It used to be serious enough when we had to call in a doctor at two guineas a time to put her in bed and give her baking soda.

MR. C. Oh, come now. You are rather hard on the doctors.

MARCUS. Not at all. I've a sort of sneaking admiration for doctors all the same. The second oldest profession in the world and still going strong. But that's by the way. See here, listen, Mr. Carmichael. I wanted a word with you by yourself. I wanted to tell you that I am very hurt and displeased at the attitude of the Business Committee of the Kirk Session.

MR. C. Now just in what way have they displeased you, Mr. Groundwater?

MARCUS. It's about this building contract. You know perfectly well that as a ruling elder I had no wish or inclination to quote for it. But ever since the rebuilding scheme came on the tapis last spring certain individuals

have been nag nag nagging and pestering me to take over the contract. Thought they would get the work done on the cheap because I happened to be a prominent figure in the Church. Now, after I had quoted a cut-throat price I won't make a penny piece out of, here they go behind my back and ask Wyllie & Symington for a quotation.

MR. C. I know nothing about business, Mr. Groundwater, but my information is that Wyllie & Symington are prepared to do the job for a considerably smaller sum.

MARCUS. They've quoted at one thousand and fifty-five pounds below my offer. They're making you a present of it

MR. C. You know I never cant, Mr. Groundwater. I abominate cant. But it runs in my mind that gifts to the Lord never go unrepaid.

MARCUS. Gifts to the Lord! You know perfectly well that I'm as generous as my neighbour. I practically put in the new organ myself. But there's a limit. There's the Economic Law, and that's God's Law—you can say what you like. Supply and Demand, and fair, untrammelled competition. This offer of Wyllie & Symington's is sheer damned foolishness. Of course they'll put the loss down to advertising expenses, but that isn't business. . . . See here, Mr. Carmichael, you've said yourself I'm a very valued member. We've been more like friends than a Minister and Elder, the pair of us. And there's Hamish taken a notion to Elsie. It's like we'll be closer connected still, before very long. And now I've been put on the University Court it'll be bad luck or bad guidance if I can't get my spiritual adviser made a Doctor of Divinity before the year's out. I'll tell you what, I'll make you a fair offer. I'll cut down my price £500 and count that as a wedding present to the young folks, and you'll put your foot down on this Wyllie & Symington business. After all, you're the shepherd of the flock;

You should have some say in the way they spend their money.

MR. C. I've already told you I don't understand business.

MARCUS. But this isnae business. It's on a higher plane altogether. Pure, undiluted friendship. £500 doesnae grow on every bush.

MR. C. As I say, I don't understand business. I never indulge in highfaluting, but my mind is occupied by what I conceive to be more important matters. I am quite willing to leave money matters to Mr. Lang, Bailie Dallas, Sir John Small, Mr. Shillitto and yourself.

MARCUS. But, God bless my soul, there's not a business man among the bunch of them except myself.

MR. C. Then perhaps you will be able to convert the others to your views. I wash . . .

MARCUS. But listen, Mr. Carmichael. . . .

MR. C. I wash my hands . . .

MARCUS. But you cannae do that, Mr. Carmichael. Though I say it that shouldn't I've a big following in the congregation, and if I was reluctantly compelled to give up my sittings there would be a stampede to the doors that would bring the whole jing bag about your ears.

MR. C. Please allow me to finish what I was going to say. I wash my hands of the whole matter.

MARCUS. Well, I'm not responsible for your ablutions, but, my God, you'll be sorry for it.

MR. C. I have yet to be sorry for anything I have done in all my life.

MARCUS. Do you tell me? Imphm. Well, it aye takes a beginning, and you'll start being sorry next month if that Wyllie & Symington tender goes through.

MR. C. Look here. Are you THREATENING me?

[BEELZEBUB *shows interest, and* IRA, AVARICIA *and* SUPERBIA *are dancing with excitement.*

ELSIE (*singing without*). "One fine day a ship . . ." (*and so on from "Madame Butterfly"*).

MARCUS. Threatening you? I know my place better. You're awful thin in the skin to-day. It's not for me to say, but I repeat it, you'll regret it all your life if you let these incompetent rascals put a finger on your new Kirk. They've made a bonny mess of the houses of Corporation tenants, never mind the House of God! The rest was only daffing. You should cultivate a sense of humour.

MR. C. No one has ever accused me of lacking a sense of humour before. As a matter of fact I have a very fine sense of humour.

MARCUS. Fine I know it. Fine I know it. You had the Rotary Club in fits last month. I could hardly keep from smiling myself. Well, Elsie, how's the invalid?

ELSIE (*entering, sitting down on the slope and taking out a cigarette*). Oh, she's all right. She's getting a recipe for something sweet and beastly from Mumsie. . . . What an excruciatingly jam day!

MR. C. The modern young woman has no more respect for her mother tongue than she has for her parents, Mr. Groundwater.

MARCUS. Oh, they're great wee rascals. I like them fine.

[*He looks admiringly at* ELSIE, *whose attitude shows rather unstudied grace than virgin modesty. The* Sins, *except* LUXURIA, *look depressed and irritable.*

And what conventions are you turning tapsalteerie this winter, Miss Elsie? You'll have to come round some evening and teach me this new Cincinnati Dip. We see no young folks about the house now Hamish is away to his depôt.

[HAMISH *and* PETTIGREW *come back.*

Oh, here's the sodger boy himself. Hamish, what about a party?

HAMISH. A what?

MARCUS. A party. Some night. For Miss Elsie.

HAMISH. Oh, a *party*. How topping. It's a dear old word "party." Crackers and conundrums and things. And a cake, with eighteen candles for Elsie's birthday.

ELSIE. Nineteen, you fool.

[HAMISH *laughs and sits down in front:* PETTIGREW *in front of him.*

MARCUS. Well, Pettigrew. There's a picture for you. Less expense in paint and more fun than when you took Maggie's portrait. I doubt you'd no' be any quicker in getting done with it either.

PETTIGREW. I'd like very much to paint Miss Carmichael, if she'd let me.

[*Enter the two married women.*

MRS. G. Oh, don't let him, Elsie. When he did my portrait it was the most fatiguing thing I ever endured. Tiresome! I must have eaten pounds of olives and salted almonds He might have been painting Buckingham Palace, the time he took. From cellar to attic.

MR. C. Are you quite recovered, Mrs. Groundwater?

MRS. G. Quite, thanks. So silly of me. But I think if there's a tiny half bottle of that nice Ayala left, and perhaps a chicken sandwich. . . .

PETTIGREW. I'll get it for you, Mrs. Groundwater.

[ACCIDIA *goes out R.*

MRS. G. Thank you so much. A cushion, Hamish.

[*She sits down and automatically gets to work on the liqueur chocolates.*

I can't think why I was so silly. So undignified too. Oh, what wouldn't I do to be strong and well like you, Elsie. What a nice young man Mr. Pettigrew is, and such a clever, clever artist.

MARCUS. Oh, he's clever enough. He got £30 in

advance out of me last September for a six-foot-by-four landscape he said was nearly ready. With cows in the foreground. It's not everybody could do that, I can tell you. I don't mean do cows—do me, I mean. The Haunting Melody, he called it. Haunting! All I know is there's been no manifestation over my sitting-room mantelpiece, and I'm beginning not to believe in ghosts.

MRS. C. He certainly doesn't seem to kill himself with overwork. I expect he has money of his own.

MARCUS. Not a stiver. Not a maik. He lives by his wits, if you ask me.

MRS. G. Oh, but that's the artistic temperament.

MR. C. He has marvellous technique. It is a pity he has to wait so long and so patiently for inspiration.

HAMISH. Feel like manging up the funny old burn for a brief space, old Elsie?

ELSIE. No, thanks.

MRS. C. Do go, Elsie. There's plenty of time, but don't be late.

ELSIE. No. I'm quite happy as I am. I'm in a state of poisoned rapture. The sun and the hills and what not. I have no time for vulgar intrigues with pococurantic young modern mutts. I'm a kelpie or something.

MR. C. Pococurantic?

HAMISH. Oh, dammit. These are harsh words.

MRS. C. I wish you wouldn't say "mutts," Elsie.

[PETTIGREW *arrives with viands for* MRS. GROUNDWATER; ACCIDIA *following.*

MARCUS. Wait a bit. I've got a pack of cards. Let's play Nap or something. We can play for matches.

HAMISH. Oh, what fun.

ELSIE. How murderously attractive.

MRS. G. No. Let's just sit still and enjoy ourselves. Let's bask in the sun like wild-eyed bucolic Ludo eaters. No, Lotos eaters. I wonder whether they were nice. Lotoses, I mean.

ELSIE. Like anæmic artichokes, I should think.

MR. C. Well, I don't know what you people propose to do, but I, personally, am going to sleep.

[*He settles himself comfortably. He suits the action to the word.* MRS. CARMICHAEL *arranges a cushion below his handsome head.* PETTIGREW *begins a drawing.* HAMISH *looks alternately at it and at* ELSIE, *who is thinking long, long thoughts.*

ELSIE. What are you doing, Mr. Pettigrew?

PETTIGREW. Oh, drawing.

ELSIE. Me?

PETTIGREW. Yes.

ELSIE. Am I lovely?

PETTIGREW. Yes.

HAMISH. Let me see.

MARCUS (*who has taken out a pocket-book*). 5, 7, 9, 8, 2, 3 and carry 3 is 37. Three to carry. Ach, to blazes.

[*He tilts his hat over his eyes and lies back.*

HAMISH. I wish I could draw like that. Not a bit like, but damn clever.

PETTIGREW (*chewing a pencil and rubbing with his thumb*). God bless you, Mr. Copperfield.

HAMISH. Heigh, sirs! It's a damn fine day.

[*He settles and stares at* ELSIE. MRS. GROUNDWATER *is nodding. So is her husband.* MRS. CARMICHAEL *takes out a novel and pretends to read, stealing sharp, angry glances at* MRS. GROUNDWATER *the while. The tinkle of a distant river is heard.*

BEELZEBUB *looks at the* Sins *and they look at* BEELZEBUB. ACCIDIA *is the only* Sin *who is not entirely shamefaced. But in fine she knows that all this is none of her doing.* BEELZEBUB *begins to speak in a harsh penetrating whisper.*

BEELZEBUB. "Melodious birds sing madrigals" . . . By Eblis' guts,

A bonny like covey of Sins for to louse on the World!
Could you pervert a monkey? Could you, by Hell's
black reek?

SUPERBIA. By Rhadamanthus, Sir, you do us wrong,
How can men sin when they are warmed and fed?
Hold up your gash black hand athwart the sun;
Then, Master, you shall see what will befall.

BEELZEBUB. Tyach! . . . Ye pernickety craturs.
Look. Are ye satisfied now?

[*He holds forth his hand and spreads his fingers. Immediately the stage grows gloomy as* BEELZEBUB's *hand blocks the rays of the sun. The* Sins *creep forward from the rock and form a semicircle round the picnic party.* BEELZEBUB *watches intently like a great broken-winged bat.* MRS. GROUNDWATER *sneezes and shivers. She wakes. The* Sins *are ranged behind their appropriate victims.*

MRS. G. I had such a lovely dream. I was lunching in a big hotel. And now it's cold.

[*She seizes an unfinished sandwich.*

Hello, Mr. Carmichael. Are you awake too? What were you dreaming about?

MR. C. I dreamed . . . dreamed that I went up to Heaven to the sound of golden trumpets and there—above the cherubim—there was a Fourth Seat. You pitiful fat woman. How dare you speak to ME?

MARCUS. Eh? What's that? What are you saying to my wife? Fat, is she? Fat, eh? Whose car did you drive out in? Who paid for it and the tax and the petrol and the insurance and the damned lazy devil of a showfoor? You maybe, you blithering, cocksure sky-pilot.

MR. C. Ha! So that's the way of it?

MARCUS. See here. You'll return that twenty quid I lent you when you got your call. Plus interest. And

pretty quick too. I'll teach you to put a spoke in my wheel and diddle me out of my rightful profits, you preachifying pauper. Doll about in my car, and look down your nose at me.

PETTIGREW (*tearing up his drawing*). Oh, stow your gab the lot of you. You make my soul sick.

[*He rolls over on his back and* ACCIDIA *tickles his chin.* LUXURIA *turns up her little nose in contempt.*

MR. C. I have no words to express . . .

MRS. C. What's that? Who drove out in your car? *Your* car! The car you stole from your workmen and customers. You cheat, you. You war profiteer. Who ate all my sandwiches and my veal and ham pie? All you brought was half a dozen of cheap fizzy wine and that fat sow over there drank every drop of it herself. You dirty, stingy old miser.

MARCUS. Stingy. Listen to that! You're mad. You're mad!

MR. C. You shut up.

MRS. C. You're better than I am, I suppose, and that's why I have to slave, slave, slave my life out keeping up appearances for that vain, sulky, conceited, bellowing bull over there.

MR. C. Woman! What is this I hear?

MRS. C. You hear just what you are, Somerled Carmichael! And your wife's a nobody. All the pious, prayerful women in their fox furs come slavering over you and pity you for not having a harem of buxom voluptuous beauties like them instead of a wee, shilpit, beaten thing like me.

MR. C. Well, well, well, well, well! What viper is this I have nourished in my bosom?

ELSIE (*screaming with anger*). Be quiet, will you? Be quiet both of you or I'll kill you. I've had to put up with your dull pomposity, Dad, and your fussy cattishness, Mother, for all these years, and now you break out

in your true colours and disgrace me before my friends. You rotten, rotten, rotten, dirty pair. Damn you, damn you, damn you!

MRS. C. Ha, you'd like *her* for a mother would you? (*Nods over to* MRS. GROUNDWATER *and leers at her.*)

MARCUS. Listen you here, Carmichael.

MR. C. I'm listening, you mangy dog. (*They glare.*)

HAMISH (*who is crawling upstage to* ELSIE *on all fours like a tomcat*). What lots of pretty legs you have, grandma!

ELSIE. Get away, you!

HAMISH (*jumping up and springing at her*). You darling devil, I'll bite your heart out.

[*They fall together on the slope fighting furiously. Enter* CHARITY *in haste.*

CHARITY. Oh, Faith! Oh, Hope! Oh hurry up. Do. Please. I know you're breathless, but you must be quick.

ELSIE. Let go, you swine. I'll murder you.

TABLEAU

[CARMICHAEL *is standing over* GROUNDWATER *in a threatening attitude.* MRS. GROUNDWATER *is stuffing herself with sandwiches and liqueur chocolates and washing them down with champagne. She is now in the contented stage of alcoholism.* MRS. CARMICHAEL *on hands and knees is looking at her with evil glee and encouraging her to drink.* PETTIGREW *is lying supine with his eyes shut in a sneer on his face.* CHARITY *rings a little bell on the top of her magic wand and unhooks a little microphone.*

CHARITY. Hello. Yes. Number One, The Firmament.
Hello. Hello. Hello. Yes. Are you there?
Phœbus Apollo, for the love of Mike,
What are you doing with the sunshine, please?

PHŒBUS (*distant but silver clear*). A Devil has put his hand across the sun.

CHARITY. Oh, bite it then. Bite it. Be quick. Be quick.

PHŒBUS. I'll throw a sun spot at it. Will that do?

CHARITY. Oh, don't ask questions. Do it. Do be quick.

[BEELZEBUB *suddenly withdraws his hand, uttering a devilish exclamation. The sun shines out.*

BEELZEBUB. Something has burned my hand.

CHARITY. And serve you jolly well right!

BEELZEBUB. Was it for this I burst the crust of Mount Etna with flames?
Whatna jaunt for a Deil! O ye skinny wee Sins,
What have I got for my jaunt but an awfu' sair finger?
Atchye. . . . O Moloch grant patience . . . ye charity weans!
I'll awa to my sulphurous baths and my cunning masseurs.
You can dae what ye like wi' the folk, for I'll never come back.

[*He descends, and sooty smoke rises. The* Sins *creep desolate to the shelter of the rock. The picnic party look at one another in amaze.* CHARITY *withdraws to the wings and stands looking on, dabbing her nose with a little lace handkerchief.*

MR. C. I don't know what to say.

MARCUS. Well, better not say it. The time's getting on. We'd better be getting back to the Rolls-Royce. Hamish, take your mother's other arm. Upsy daisy. Easy does it.

MRS. G. (*weeping*). And I was so happy. So very, very happy.

MR. C. (*to his wife*). Come along then, dear. I . . . in fact . . . I . . . This is the first time in my life I have been at a loss for an appropriate remark. I say, Pettigrew. Do get up. We're going home.

[*Alarums and excursions. At last* ELSIE, *the* Three Graces *and the* Seven Deadly Sins *are left in possession of the stage.*

FAITH. You are the Limit. Yes, indeed you are.
I must say this time you have gone too far.

HOPE. What Faith has said is absolutely true.
An INSTITUTION is the place for you!

LUXURIA. Oh, please don't send us to an Institution.

SUPERBIA. Shut up, Luxuria.

CHARITY. Yes. I'm afraid it is the only way.
I will arrange to have it done to-day.

ELSIE. Excuse me, are you Charity? I was at one of your dances last winter.

CHARITY. Yes, Miss Carmichael, I am Charity.

ELSIE. Joking apart, are you really going to send them to an Institution? Where they'll have prayers morning and evening and cocoa at eleven?

CHARITY (*relapsing into prose*). Well, I mean what else can I do?

HOPE. They can't behave themthelveth.

FAITH. It will do them all the good in the world.

ELSIE. Well, if you do it will be the most CALAMITOUSLY cruel thing I ever heard of. Poor little things, how can they help being Sins? They don't know any better and they have to express their personalities somehow. Besides, what on earth am I to do without them? . . . Charity, Faith, Hope! Leave me my little deadly sins. I'll tell you what, I'll look after them. Maternal instinct and so forth. You won't know them in a year or two. Is it a bet? Can I?

CHARITY. O very well. I simply can't say No.
Have your own way about it. . . . Oh, hello!
Some sandwiches and things! I say, Hooray!
We haven't had a bite to eat to-day.

[*The* Graces, *with merry giggles, begin a small picnic on what* MRS. GROUNDWATER *has left.*

ELSIE. How just too devastatingly dear of you!

Good-bye then. . . . Now Superbia and Ira, don't look so sullen. Wipe that beastly rouge off your face and pull down your leopard skin, Luxuria. Avaricia, take your hands out of your pockets. Gula, you can't have any of these sandwiches. The Aunties need them all. Invidia, stop pinching Luxuria. Pull up your stockings, Accidia. Now come along. You'll be late for supper, and I've got a date with Hamish for the Diner Dansant.

[ELSIE *goes out leading* SUPERBIA *and* IRA *by the hand. The others follow sheepishly.*

CHARITY (*laughing at some joke or other*). Hello. One, Firmament. Phœbus, is that you?
Here, could you let us have an hour or two
More daylight for a special treat. To-night.
Charity speaking. Yes, thanks. Quite all right.
How splendid of you. Thank you. Yes. Quite well.

[*Hangs up receiver.*

I wonder if old B. got safe to Hell.

FAITH. The very same thought that occurred to me.
Hope, dearie, won't you ring him up and see?

HOPE. All right. (*She takes receiver from* CHARITY.)
Thix, thix, thix, Pandemonium.

CHARITY. She lisps in numbers for the numbers come.

HOPE. Hello. Yeth. No. Hello. Hello. No. No.
Number engaged? All right. Yeth. Yeth. Hello!
Exthcuthe me. There'th a buthing. Can you hear?
Beelthebub? Hope thpeaking. . . .

[*A flash. Black out leaving the* Aunties *under a single broad spot-light.*

Dear, dear, dear!

FAITH. Always the same bad loser. Never mind.
Evil is but as piffle in the wind.
Come wind, come rain, come tempest, hail or rack
Virtue is still the same good horse to back.

[*Bell rings.*

CHARITY. Yes. Yes. Is that you, Pandemonium? Yes. Listen, Faith, he says "A Time will Come!"

FAITH. He says so, does he? Very well. We'll see. (*Lights go up.*) Ho! Ho!

CHARITY. Ha! Ha!

HOPE. Hehehehehehe!

CURTAIN.

THE APOTHEOSIS

The Scene is a sort of lounge-drawing-room with big French windows. Curtains can be pulled over them and a suburban garden can be seen through them. The room is in SIR MARCUS GROUNDWATER'S *house in Kelvinshields, near Glasgow. The time is late summer. Five years have passed since the dreadful events before the Interval.* LADY GROUNDWATER, *on her face the Peace (ruffled occasionally by an attack of waterbrash) that Passeth All Understanding, is reclining on a semi-invalid couch and darning socks. She is plainly dressed, but a piece of thermogene unskilfully tucked into her bosom adds a subdued note of colour. In the garden an aged man in a sleeved waistcoat is raking a gravel path. Man? When he takes off his nasty old hat to wipe his steaming brow we are startled to observe little horns sprouting from his forehead. He is* BEELZEBUB. CHARITY *enters, wearing enough of the costume of a serving-maid to indicate that she is that for the present. She carries a tray with letters and medicine on it.*

CHARITY. I've took the letters from the letter-box. Now then, my lady, lay aside them socks. . . . My! What a lovely day! How blue the Heavens is! I almost misremembered your elevenses.

LADY G. Oh, thank you so much, Jane. I didn't know it was so late. Time does fly, doesn't it? The hands of the clock go round so, it makes a person giddy to look at them. Do you remember—of course, you must—where it says:

Ah! catch the flitting moments where they flit,
Gather the something rosebuds while you can,
Nor all your tears wipe out a jot of it . . .?

[*A bland but urgent hiccough interrupts her.*

Pardon me . . . I always say . . . Beg pardon . . . I

always say. Dear me I'll be forgetting my home address next. What is it I always say, now?

CHARITY. Now, mum, I mean, my lady, I should say,
Don't bother trying to recall to-day
The nice remark you say you always say,
For if you always are a saying it,
We're sure some time to get the benefit.
If I may make so bold as ask a question,
How do you find the nasty indigestion?

LADY G. Oh, much better, thank you. Much, much, much, much, much better. And by the way, *would* you very much mind asking Faith to keep the kitchen door shut? I don't know why it is, but I do dislike the smell of cooking. I hate to feel that way, even about a smell, but we're poor bodies and we can't help ourselves. You'll tell her, won't you?

CHARITY. In course I will now, bless your tender heart;
And Faith, I'm sure, will take it in good part.

[*She sees the Gardener and starts.*

This afternoon I fancied I could see
Glittering scales below the apple-tree,
And now who's that? . . . Oh, only old Macpherson!
I took him for a very different person
Just for an instant! . . . Deary me to-day!
Drink up your bismuth and I'll clear away.

[LADY GROUNDWATER *drinks and* CHARITY, *all of a flutter at what she thought she saw, clears away and goes out.* LADY G. *gets up and totters to the gramophone. She starts it playing, I am sorry to say, the Barcarole from the "Tales of Hoffman." She sits down to her socks again with a contented sigh. She hums the air a semitone higher than it is played on the gramophone.* SIR MARCUS *wanders in. He is as restless as ever, but he has lost purpose. He looks always a little puzzled, these days.*

LADY G. Oh, hello, Marky! You gave me quite a little fright. I thought you had gone to the office.

MARCUS. Oh, no, no, no, no. I thought. . . . No. I've got twa-three things to do. Hello! Letters?

LADY G. Dear me, yes! I forgot all about them. (*They open letters.*)

MARCUS. Aye, aye. What's the tune?

LADY G. It's a bit of Schumann's "Unfinished Symphony." Do you mind it?

MARCUS. No. I like a bit of religious music now and again. It gives me a kind of a delightful sort of dwawm.

LADY G. Such an awful pity he didn't finish it. It begins with Fate knocking at the door, or else it's a man buried alive knocking on his coffin-lid. I forget which. I must ask Mrs. Carmichael. I think it's so nice. . . . Yes, knocking on the lid, I think it is.

MARCUS. I thought yon was a scratch on the record.

LADY G. No, no. It's at the beginning. Before you came in. . . . Dear me!

MARCUS. What's the matter, hen?

LADY G. The Carmichaels. Stop the record, please, lovey. . . . The Carmichaels are coming to lunch. Tuts, tuts.

MARCUS. What way, "Tuts"?

LADY G. I've just remembered that girl Elsie's up from London—I mean down from London for the week-end. It's in all the papers. It's awfle awkward.

MARCUS. How awkward?

LADY G. Hamish, of course. You know. The poor boy. He's never got over it.

MARCUS. Ugh, I don't believe he gives her a thought.

LADY G. Marky, a mother knows. Besides, nobody seems to think of anybody but Elsie these days. You can't get away from her. See. There she is in the "Tatler" again.

MARCUS. Aye! And very nice too.

LADY G. I suppose you have to, if you're a great author. But I wouldn't get photographed in MY bath, even if I'd written the Bible and the "Pilgrim's Progress." However, I suppose it's a lady photographer took it.

MARCUS. And you think Hamish. . . . ? Oh, he'll get over it. He'll get over it all right.

LADY G. I wonder. I don't know. Marky, if I had treated you cruelly long, long ago. If I had married wee Slimmen the way Ma wanted me to. Would you . . . would you be the man you are to-day ?

MARCUS. It's a question. Maybe no'. Maybe no'. Aye, aye, Imphm. . . . What's for lunch ?

LADY G. I never ask, these days. It's funny. I used to be quite interested in my meals. I leave it all to Faith, now. She's a splendid plain cook. So economical.

MARCUS. Tyach! Economy! Rice pudding three days running. I'll tell this, she'd be better of a wee bit less economy and more imagination.

LADY G. Well, I always say, better a loaf of bread and quietness therewith than an army with banners. And rice pudding's so wholesome. And she made last Sunday's *gigot* do till Friday—yesterday.

MARCUS. But why ? We're not so hard up as all that comes to.

LADY G. Well, you see, I always think it's such a good example to them that are not so—so fortunate as we are.

MARCUS. Aye, aye. And there's a lot of them like that. Hard times. We should be very thankful. A lot. Here's a note from Mistress Steviston. . . . What did I give last year to her Do-you-believe-in-Fairies Guild ?

LADY G. I forget. It's such a good, good cause. "Do you believe in fairies ?" It's such a pretty idea, I think. I often think we're further off from Heaven than when we were a girl. At least I was a girl. You weren't of course.

MARCUS. Oh, what a damned shame!

LADY G. Yes, it is, isn't it? . . . What is?

MARCUS. This letter. It's from the Bank. About that bill I backed for Wyllie & Symington.

LADY G. Wyllie and . . .? Oh, you mean the builder people who were so nasty about that contract for the church extension? Years ago.

MARCUS. They might well be nasty. After all it was kind of thoughtless of me to put up the new church hall for nothing. They were having a hard struggle just then, and the contract would maybe have brought them bye the bit. . . . But I'm afraid there'll be trouble over the head of this bill. . . . I've bitten off more nor I can chew. I'll have to see . . . what . . . Puir auld Symington! They tell me he has varicose veins in his leg. And him near seventy.

LADY G. It is a hard life for the old.

[GROUNDWATER *goes to the window to hide his emotion. He notices* BEELZEBUB.

MARCUS. Oh, good-morning, Macpherson.

BEELZEBUB. Good-morning to you, Sir Marcus. I trust that I see you in health?

MARCUS. Pretty fair. Pretty fair. The midges bad this morning?

BEELZEBUB. I love the wee busy bit things as if I had been their faither. Maybe I am, in a way. . . . How is her leddyship keeping?

MARCUS. Fine, thanks, fine. Macpherson's asking for you, Maggie.

LADY G. Oh, good-morning, Macpherson. I had a wee walk round the garden this morning with Miss Hope. Your new parabola is going to be a great success. What was it you were going to train over it, now?

BEELZEBUB. I thocht, if your leddyship pleases, to bigg it wi' ramblers and hops.

LADY G. Doesn't that sound a little unrestful. But I suppose life is like that, isn't it?

MARCUS. No rest for the wicked. No rest for the wicked.

BEELZEBUB. And ye're no sae far wrang, I may tell ye. . . . By the Blistering Grids of Gehannum!

[*He goes, muttering angrily.*

LADY G. What did he say?

MARCUS. He's a wee bittie free with his language. A character though. Fine old Scotch type. I think I'll raise his wages.

[HAMISH *comes in. He has left the Army. He is in Holy Orders. He salutes his Mamma and nods respectfully to his Father.*

MARCUS. 'Morning, Hamish.

LADY G. Well, Lambikin?

HAMISH. Good-morning, Mother. Good-morning, Dad.

MARCUS. And where have you been all morning?

HAMISH. I was breakfasting with the Bish.

LADY G. Is it quite respectful to call your Bishop, Bish?

HAMISH. Oh, we don't call him that to his face, of course. Not that he'd mind, really. He's a very good sort, the old Bish.

LADY G. Such a nice man. I do think the Scottish Episcopal Church is so distinguy.

HAMISH. What exactly do you mean, Mother?

LADY G. Oh, I don't know. It's the atmosphere that's so nice. Having breakfast with Bishops, and so on.

MARCUS. The United Free Church is good enough for me. They're a persecuting lot, Bishops.

LADY G. Oh no, Marky! Don't you remember the Trial of the Thirty-nine Bishops, when they lit such a

bonfire—and candles and things in Smithfield Market, Bloody Mary of Argyle, you know. That's HISTORY! And their gaiters and little black kilts. What did he say to you, Hamish?

MARCUS. Well, I don't know. I draw the line at Popery, and there's a . . .

LADY G. But it wasn't the Pope, darling. It was the Bishop. The Pope lives in the Vacuum in Venice. What did the Bishop say to you, Hamish?

HAMISH. Well, there were several of us, and he just sloshed around a kind word here and a chatty remark there, and so forth. Very matey and all that. About evangelicals and that sort of merchant.

LADY G. I know. I used to love Wordsworth's "Evangelic" when I was a little girl. . . . Hamish, I'm so glad you left the Army.

HAMISH. Oh, absolutely.

LADY G. And you never regretted it, son?

HAMISH. Not a scrap. I'd no option, really. You remember the chappie in the Bible who got it as it were where he lived and decided to cut it all out henceforward? I mean, CONVICTION and all that sort of rot. After that—that day on Loch Lomond some sort of something or other said to me, "You're for it, old tough; you're blowing up merrily, for a mucker. . . ."

LADY G. It was a Higher Power speaking to you, Hamish.

HAMISH. Yes, I know. . . . And then. . . . Well, I mean, I ask you? I as near as touch joined the Salvation Army. . . . I don't know why I am talking all this rot. . . . Hello! There are the Carmichaels.

MARCUS. They're coming to lunch.

LADY G. Are they . . . is it just Mister and Missis?

HAMISH. Yes. Why?

LADY G. Oh, nothing. It's just that. . . . No, it's nothing. That'll be all right. Shout to them to come in by the window, Marcus.

MARCUS. Hey! Mr. Carmichael! (*He goes out.*)

LADY G. Darling, it's as well to prepare you. Elsie may be coming. They expected her to be with them.

HAMISH. Elsie? Oh, yes. What about it?

LADY G. I'm so glad you take it so calmly. So very, very glad.

HAMISH. Mater, I've been trying to tell you. I'm different now. I mean, girls are a wash-out so far as I'm concerned. I'm joining a celibate order.

LADY G. What is it celebrated for?

HAMISH. Celibate, celibate! I mean they take a vow not to—to marry and all that sort of thing. Renounce the Flesh in a way.

LADY G. Ah! Vegetarians!

HAMISH. No, no. Not necessarily. . . . Good-afternoon, Mrs. Carmichael. Good-afternoon, sir.

[*The* CARMICHAELS *come in, followed by* SIR MARCUS. CARMICHAEL *has grown a beard and an inferiority complex. His clothes are only semi-clerical, but he wears a white necktie.* MRS. CARMICHAEL'S *haggard expression is intensified by an almost continuous smile—a watery beam.*

MRS. C. How do you do, Mr. Hamish. How are you, Lady Groundwater?

LADY G. Quite, quite well. Now, do sit down. You must be tired. How do you do, Mr. Carmichael?

CARMICHAEL. Quite well, thank you, Lady Groundwater. May my wife and I congratulate you in person—offer our very respectful congratulations on the well-deserved honour His Majesty has been pleased to bestow upon your household?

MRS. C. Oh, it's so nice and we're so pleased. Somerled and I feel quite grand now, knowing titled people. I find myself bringing your name into conversation oftener than ever.

LADY G. Oh dear me, we're getting quite used to it

already. We are just the same plain, simple folk we always were.

"Proud rank is but a penny stamp,
For a' that and so forth."

MARCUS. Plain, douce folk.

LADY G. Come and take off your things, Mrs. Carmichael. Dear me, it's ages since you crossed our doorstep. You must give me all the news. You're *such* a stranger. (*They go out.*)

HAMISH. I'll take your hat and stick.

CARMICHAEL. Oh, please don't trouble. I . . .

HAMISH. Oh, rot. I'm going anyhow. (*He goes.*)

MARCUS. Have a cigar.

CARMICHAEL. Dare I, do you think? Well. . . . Thanks. It will be a great treat. But perhaps if you don't mind, I'll keep it till after luncheon. And, Sir Marcus, just before the ladies come down, may I have a word with you?

MARCUS. Surely, surely. What is it?

CARMICHAEL. I hate to bother you with my affairs on—on a day like this, but you've been so kind, and as I may not have another opportunity while Mrs.—I beg your pardon, Lady Groundwater is upstairs. . . .

MARCUS. Go on, sir, go on. We're auld freens, the twa o' us.

CARMICHAEL. Well, to come to the point, as you can't fail to have noticed, since my—ah—nervous breakdown I have—the congregation has—well, in point of fact, I've lost whatever grip I had on the congregation. They've been most awfully kind and forbearing. But my sermons, for instance—you don't mind my talking about myself?—my sermons seem to have lost—well, inspiration—if they ever had any. I'm beginning to doubt it.

MARCUS. I wouldn't say that. Very thoughtful and scholarly I've always thought them.

CARMICHAEL. No. It's kind of you to say so, and you've been very loyal. But others are drifting away. Quite excusably, of course. Please don't imagine that I blame them. As you know I've repeatedly asked to be relieved of my charge.

MARCUS. Well, we won't hear of it. And that's all that's about it.

CARMICHAEL. It's beautiful of you, and it warms my heart to hear you say it. But I've taken the liberty of raising the question individually with Mr. Lang, Bailie Dallas, Mr. Shillitto and others, and practically the whole Session are in favour of my retirement.

MARCUS. Well, it's not fair! It's most unfair. I'll settle that lot of . . . Oh, dear me! Mr. Carmichael, I doubt I'm getting old. I haven't the fight in me that I once had. But if doubling my freewill offering will do any good. . . .

CARMICHAEL. No, no, no. I'll never be able to repay you for all you have done. But it's not only the sermons. I've lost hold. I tell you the truth is that I'm not worthy to be a minister of the Gospel. Look here! Is there any job I could do in your firm? A timekeeper, or something. No, I'm not accurate enough for that. A— a hod-carrier?

MARCUS. Are you serious?

CARMICHAEL. Dead serious. I daren't go on. I daren't.

MARCUS. But you're an educated man.

CARMICHAEL. No, no. Not even that. I was at a Scottish Public School. . . . I know a little Greek and Latin and a little Hebrew.

MARCUS. The Hebrew might help you in a commercial career. . . . But you've just got me all muddled up. I don't know where I am these days. I've lost purpose. I . . .

[*Enter* HOPE *with a sheaf of papers. She wears horn-rimmed spectacles to show that she is a Secretary.*

HOPE. Thir Marcuth, I have brought the . . .
Oh, dear me!
Thethe thpecth have made me I can hardly thee;
I' didn't know you were engaged jutht now
Thethe paperth hardly matter anyhow.

MARCUS. This is Miss Hope, Mr. Carmichael. She's my Secretary now, you know. We've solved the Servant Problem. Miss Hope and her two sisters have come to us as domestic helps. Lady helps.

HOPE. I'm thure I hope tho. For it ith quite true
A girl can be a help and a lady too.

[*Re-enter* LADY GROUNDWATER and MRS. CARMICHAEL.

LADY G. Fancy! Mrs. Carmichael has never seen Mr. Pettigrew's new picture of me. There it is, Mrs. Carmichael.

MRS. C. Oh, how lovely!

LADY G. It's not really like, of course. It's modern, you see. But Mr. Pettigrew paints the Soul. That's really my soul, not me.

MRS. C. And a kind, sweet soul it is.

LADY G. Not at all. Not at all. Now, now, now, now, Mrs. Carmichael. . . . Every now and again I think it's good—I mean the picture—and then I sort of don't.

HOPE. I think it's lovely, Mum, I really do.
Now ith that clever Mr. Pettigrew?

LADY G. He's in London now. Doing awfully well. Didn't you know? You knew of course, Mrs Carmichael?

MRS. C. Well. . . . Elsie wrote. . . . She hasn't time to write often, poor girl, but she said . . . well, something about . . . about Mr. Pettigrew and her . . . Of course she was only in fun. I mean to say, Lady Groundwater, even if their idea of fun nowadays is a little BROAD, it doesn't matter if the heart's in the right place, does it? . . . At any rate, she seems to have adopted Mr. Pettigrew, in a way.

LADY G. The kind-hearted girl! And he's a great credit to her. Done so well. Did you see his photograph in this week's "Tatler," talking to a Duchess in pyjamas? And they say his pictures are worth thousands of pounds, now.

HOPE. Thouthandth of poundth a picture! Oh, I thay!
They mutht be happy up Parnathuth way!

LADY G. Art is a marvellous gift. Thousands of pounds!

MARCUS. Sit down, everybody. Sit down, sit down. You were speaking of Elsie. Any news of her? We half thought we'd have the pleasure of seeing her to-day. She's a big swell now, I hear.

THE CARMS. (*together*). Well, you see, Elsie . . .

MRS. C. I'm so sorry, dear.

CARMICHAEL. No, no. You go on, dear.

LADY G. I think Elsie's done so marvellously. Girls nowadays are very lucky. In my day a poor girl with no private means would have thought herself a very lucky girl to be making—how much is it?

MARCUS. Nine hundred pounds a week, they say.

LADY G. Nine hundred pounds a week before she was twenty-five. Very lucky. . . .

MRS. C. Yes. It is a great comfort, in a way, that she has done so well. She was always an enthusiastic, hardworking girl. I don't grudge her a penny of it.

CARMICHAEL. One could have wished, perhaps, that she had chosen some other occupation—or occupations, for she appears to have several.

MARCUS. I don't know many occupations where a working girl can earn £900 a week. She must have cornered the only possible ones. Of course, money isn't everything. But it shows you are appreciated.

[BEELZEBUB *appears in the garden, gazing at some approaching mystery.*

CHARITY (*at the door*). The famous artist, Mr. Pettigrew.

[*A resplendent* PETTIGREW *enters, and advances to his hostess with firm, rapid steps.* CHARITY *again glimpses* BEELZEBUB *through his disguise. Her shriek cuts through the welcoming noises.*

CHARITY. IN NOMINE ANGELORUM!—Is it YOU?
LADY G. Jane! My dear!
HOPE. Charity, love whatever is the matter?
CHARITY. Skittles! I've gone as batty as a hatter! Pardon, m'lady, I was quite unnerved.
Faith ast me to announce that lunch is served.

[*Exeunt* HOPE *and* CHARITY *whispering excitedly,* BEELZEBUB *has vanished.*

MARCUS. What's ado with the lassie?
LADY G. I never knew her go like that before. I hope she doesn't take fits or anything. . . . I'm so sorry, Mr. Pettigrew. Such a delightful surprise. You'll stay for lunch, I hope?
PETTIGREW. Yes. I shall.
LADY G. And Miss Carmichael. She's your—your guardian or partner or something, isn't she? Is she coming too?
PETTIGREW. She is not my guardian, she is my mistress.
MARCUS. Oh, I say! I mean to say. Look here.
PETTIGREW. She arrived this morning with her suite in the Royal Scot. In a specially built saloon. Full of orchids. She says you are not to wait luncheon. She will be here presently.
LADY G. Oh, but we must wait. It's no trouble at all.
PETTIGREW. I think you had better do what Elsie says.

MARCUS. But it's an awful-like thing to start without her when she may be here any minute.

PETTIGREW. I THINK YOU HAD BETTER DO WHAT ELSIE SAYS!

[*They stare at him. He takes* LADY GROUNDWATER'S *arm and they march, in amaze, from the room. The stage is empty for a full minute. The long melodious note of a very expensive motor horn is heard approaching. It stops. There is a trill of laughter like that heard at the "butt of the night" in the Prologue. It stops also. In a full orchestral silence,* ELSIE *enters by the French window. She is dressed with the most expressive wickedness—probably in black velvet. The* Sins *have stayed in the garden, but their sign manual is on her face. She smokes an enormous black cigarette in a huge holder and stands surveying the audience with a basilisk stare.* SHE SHOULD PLAY BLATANTLY FOR A LAUGH, *even to the extent of saying to an invisible chauffeur-footman: "Georges, will you tell Animaxander to see that the baby leopard gets his Allenbury?" . . . To her* HAMISH, *on his way to lunch. He starts twice—once on seeing her, and a second time on recognising her.*

HAMISH. Oh, hello! Miss Carmichael. And all that sort of thing.

ELSIE. Hello! And what is *your* name?

HAMISH. Who, me? I'm Hamish. . . . Groundwater, you know. Didn't you recognise me?

ELSIE. You have changed. Are you going to a fancy dress ball?

HAMISH. No. Oh, no! I'm not.

ELSIE. Then why are you so gaily dressed? Why are you dressed like the Private Secretary?

HAMISH. Oh, that! I'm in Orders now, you know.

ELSIE. Is that a Department or a Place?

HAMISH. No. Neither. Holy Orders, you know.

The Clergy, you see. I'm a clergyman, and all that sort of thing.

ELSIE. Sit down and talk to me.

HAMISH. Well, it's just lunch-time, you see. In fact they've begun. They're having it just now. Perhaps we'd better . . .

ELSIE. Sit down, I tell you! Don't stand there prattling when I tell you to do something. Don't you know who I am?

[*They sit on the couch.*

HAMISH. Well, I've heard you've become a bit of a celebrity.

ELSIE. O Fame! Fame! Fame! Or do you mean a notoriety?

HAMISH. Well, fellows say things, don't they? You write movie scenarios and novels and you act a bit, don't you?

ELSIE. Hamish, I should love to hear you describing a thunderstorm. You'd say it was a bit noisy, wouldn't you, darling?

HAMISH. Well, so it is, isn't it?

ELSIE. And the Atlantic Ocean's a bit wet, and you are a little ignorant. . . . By Blood! You stammering little provincial lout. I was once in love with you!

HAMISH. Oh, I don't think so, really. Sort of matey only. Mild boy and girl stuff. Nothing in it, really.

ELSIE. There was. There was. I adored you. Passionately. My skin crinkled when you looked at me. A lovely feeling. I adore you still.

HAMISH. Oh, look here. Listen. Shut up. I mean. That's all bilge.

ELSIE. Kiss me. Blast your eyes, kiss me. Kiss me if it kills you.

HAMISH. Easy on. I've cut all that out now, Elsie. Be a man. Pull yourself together. I'm a priest. Chuck it!

ELSIE. Take that and that. A priest should feel hellfire fanning his cheek—just once—if it blisters him. Ah, my lover!

HAMISH (*getting up*). You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I'm surprised at you. You used to be a decent sort of girl.

ELSIE. You don't like my cantharides kisses, darling?

HAMISH. No, I don't. Nor any kind. Nor you either. You've degenerated most frightfully.

ELSIE. I know I have. God help me. I know I have. Save me, Hamish.

HAMISH. Save you from what?

ELSIE. From worse than death. Sit down here and save me from worse than death.

HAMISH. Don't try to be funny.

ELSIE. Try to be funny? *Try* to be funny? Do you know that the readers of the "Sabbath Pictorial" decided by a HUGE majority that I'm the wittiest woman in the world? Eh? Do you know that I've made Dukes and Duchesses and Royalties and Ambassadors splutter the soup all over the table?

HAMISH. Dirty pigs!

ELSIE. And Archbishops and Poets and Cardinals and Dictators. . . . Oh, come and have some lunch!

HAMISH. I think we'd better.

ELSIE. No, but honestly. You can't possibly understand how my personality has developed. You read what is supposed to be all about me in the "Queen," and "Homes and Gardens" and the "Spectator" and "News of the World." But it's not me a bit. It's only people like Wells and Barrie and Beverley Nichols who really understand me, and even they are nowhere near the real ME. But I'm growing quite egocentric. Tell me all about yourself, Hamish. Have you read my new book?

HAMISH. No, I haven't. I hear it's a bit near the

knuckle even for these days. No decent fellow would read it. Besides, it's impossible to get a copy.

ELSIE. Of course, I forgot. The dear Home Secretary! But you don't know him. You don't know anything. Go in to lunch, you reinforced-concrete-headed nincompoop!

HAMISH. Very well. May I have the pleasure?

ELSIE. No, you mayn't. Go in and say I'm coming. And leave the door open.

[HAMISH *goes out.*

Let me see. Which Sin shall I take with me? Oh, yes. Gluttony hasn't had a square meal for hours. Gula, you little pig!

[GULA, *fat, oily, in an Eton suit, his hair neatly parted, enters by the chimney.*

GULA. Here I am, lady.

ELSIE. You are to lunch with me to-day. It is the old Groundwater woman's luncheon. You remember her. You should enjoy it.

GULA. By gum, I should, lady.

[*A buzz of chatter comes from the inner room.*

ELSIE. Ha! He has told them I'm coming. Remember not to speak with your mouth full.

GULA. I shall not speak at all, lady.

[GULA *and* ELSIE *enter the luncheon-room.* BEELZEBUB *appears at the window, the* Six Sins *ranged behind him. There is a rumble of thunder and the stage darkens perceptibly.*

THE SINS. Can't we go in now, Master?

INVIDIA. That fat little brat got in all right.

LUXURIA. The Aunties are nowhere to be seen.

THE SINS. Do let's go in, Master!

SUPERBIA. What do we care for the Aunties, anyway?

IRA. If they do pack us off to an Institution it's better than working overtime for that cat of a girl.

ACCIDIA. It's better than working at all.

AVARICIA. They'll be RUINED, I tell you, if we don't get in. It's only Christian to go in, Master.

THE SINS. Please let us, Master?

BEELZEBUB. Bide a wee then, ye cockiemajinkies, till I spy out the land.

[*He enters the rooms. A loud buzzing of flies is heard as he crosses into the room. It darkens still more.*

Wheesht, wheesht! Ye flies of the Air. They'll hear ye. Fly silently.

[*After a swift cautious look through the keyhole,* BEELZEBUB *takes a Hand of Glory from his pocket and lights the fingertips at a petrol lighter.*

Hist! Hist!
The Deid Man's Fist,
Nippit from off a gallows medlar, close by the wrist.
Bale licht
Burn bricht.
Shine ill beams on ill hap.
OLEOC NI ES IUQ RETSON R-R-R-RETAP!
Sleep ye that sleep;
Wake ye that wake;
Be as the deid for SATHANAS' sake!

[GULA *comes rushing out as if shot from a gun.*

GULA. Oh, Master! Oh, Master! Rissoles and rice-pudding, Master. Rissoles and rice-pudding!

BEELZEBUB. Haud you your wheesht or I'll melt you. Awa' and eat worms in the garden!

[GULA *finds a worm to eat and joins the group of* Sins.

BEELZEBUB. House! Vacuum cleaned and garnished! House! Lacquered and polished and varnished!

Open your yetts to the Seven De'ils, waur nor they were before!

[*The* Sins *burst in.* BEELZEBUB *sits down to the piano.*

BALLET OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

[SUPERBIA *lies on a couch and feigns to sleep. The* Sins *creep out except* ACCIDIA *who fans* SUPERBIA *and smooths her pillow. Enter* LUXURIA, *who tickles the sleeper with a peacock's feather.* SUPERBIA *awakes and rings a little bell. Enter* INVIDIA *with a gown and slippers.* Pas de Quatre. SUPERBIA, INVIDIA, LUXURIA and ACCIDIA. INVIDIA *and* LUXURIA *tend* SUPERBIA *before a mirror.* ACCIDIA *sits gloomily at the foot of the couch. Enter* GULA *who pays court to* SUPERBIA. Minuet. INVIDIA *goes to the door and beckons* AVARICIA. IRA *bursts from the chimney.* AVARICIA *and* GULA *fight.* GULA *catches sight of* LUXURIA *and breaks off the battle to make love to her.* Dance. GULA *sets to* LUXURIA, AVARICIA *to* SUPERBIA, ACCIDIA *and* INVIDIA *posing at opposite corners and* IRA *threading in and out of the set.*

[*Enter* FAITH, HOPE *and* CHARITY.

THE SINS. Pests and Pandemics! The Aunties!

TABLEAU

CHARITY. I knew I wasn't wrong, O Safety Pins, Hope, if it ain't those naughty little Sins!

FAITH. I never saw a sight so—so obscene. Beelzebub, whatever do you mean?

[*She snatches the Hand of Glory from the piano, blows it out and throws it into the garden.* BEELZEBUB *sits heavily down on the keys. The lights go up. The* Sins *scuttle for cover.* IRA *is unsuccessful in hiding and remains in full view. Enter* GROUNDWATER.

MARCUS. What's this, eh? What's this? Macpherson, you're drunk!

BEELZEBUB. I am a life-long teetotaller. By Eblis, you do me a wrong.

MARCUS. I do, do I? Well, you'll take a fortnight's pay. Where's my cheque-book. Here it is. "The League of Pussy's Protectors"? Well, they'll have to do without *that* fiver, anyhow.

[*He pulls out a cheque, tears it up, and writes another, crossing it.*

Here. Take that. And get to Hell out of here.

THE SINS. He's crossed it. He's crossed the cheque!

[BEELZEBUB *takes the cheque, but drops it at once, casts an evil glance on* GROUNDWATER *and backs quickly through the window, registering impotent rage.*

FAITH. That was the very way to make him go. Sir Marcus, you've done better than you know.

MARCUS. Oh, you're there, Faith, are you? Lady Groundwater will have a word or two to say to you about that lunch. Plain cook you call yourself? More plain than cook. It wasn't fit for a pig.

FAITH. It was, it was!

HOPE. Now, now, Thir Marcuth, that ith not the cathe.
Bethideth, that ith no way to thpeak to Faith.

MARCUS. Yes it is. And to you too. . . . I'm beginning to think you know as much about bookkeeping as she knows about boiling an egg. And that's nothing, nothing.

CHARITY. Sir Marcus, do be careful what you say. Much more and we might have to go away.

MARCUS. And would I break my heart if you did? No, I wouldn't. Much more of you three and I'd have high-faluted my way to the Silly House. Aye, and had a chat with the Official Receiver on the way. I feel

as if you'd sucked the soul out of me. It's my belief you are nothing but a pack of vampires.

FAITH. Vampires! He called us vampires! Oh, my hat!

Hope, did you ever hear the like of that?

HOPE. I hope you won't regret it all your life;
And Mr. Hamish and your lady wife.

[*Enter* LADY GROUNDWATER *and* ELSIE, MRS. CARMICHAEL *following.*

LADY G. Oh, and you didn't tell me where you got that lovely necklace, Elsie.

ELSIE. Oh, that's the wages of sin—paid in advance.

LADY G. I thought the wages of sin was death or something.

ELSIE. Did you?

LADY G. Oh, you're there, Faith. Faith, the rissoles were burnt to bricks and the rice-pudding was singed. It made me so ill I think I fainted. I came all over queer. Now please understand I won't have it. Hope, go and order the car. We are going to the Malmaison for a proper lunch. Charity, come upstairs and help me and Mrs. Carmichael on with our things. Come along, Mrs. Carmichael. Come, Elsie.

[*Exeunt* CHARITY *and* LADY GROUNDWATER.

MRS. C. (*to* ELSIE). Elsie, I must say this, if that was a specimen you showed us at lunch of the manners you've learnt from your fine friends, you needn't have been ashamed to introduce your poor, commonplace parents to them.

LADY G. (*without*). Do hurry, Mrs. Carmichael. I'm dying of starvation.

MRS. C. (*sotto voce*). Greedy fat beast.

[*She goes out.* GROUNDWATER *is staring with a half-burnt crossed cheque in his hand.* FAITH, *by the*

window, is forgotten but defiant. HOPE *is soothing her.* ELSIE *sits on the couch and covers her face with her hands.*

ELSIE. There's something wrong. There's something wrong.

[CARMICHAEL *comes in.*

CARMICHAEL. Groundwater!

MARCUS. Well?

CARMICHAEL. Look here. What I said before lunch. Forget it, will you? I've not been myself since—since my nervous breakdown. I've been . . . I was lost in a mist on Goat Fell. It was palpable almost, that mist. Cloying, hindering my every step. Well, just now . . . at luncheon . . . it suddenly cleared away. My doubts . . . everything like that . . . all gone. I am SURE again. Sure of my message. Sure of myself. A most extraordinary experience. Saul on the road to Damascus.

MARCUS. Aye. It wasn't bad Burgundy. The last of the bin. I'm glad you liked it.

CARMICHAEL. I see. You think I'm drunk. You and the like of you can't be expected to recognise inspiration when you see it. I don't care what you think, but I want you to forget what I said about resigning.

MARCUS. Aye. Well, I was just swithering about it. We'll see. We'll see after your sermon to-morrow.

CARMICHAEL. Yes. You'll see. By God, you'll hear a sermon to-morrow.

[*He dashes out by the French window in an ecstasy.*

MARCUS. Hey! Mr. Carmichael! The man's daft!

[*He follows. Enter* HAMISH. *He carries a glass of port in his hand. He is slightly flown with wine.*

HAMISH. Hello, old Elsie! Where are the others?

ELSIE. What? . . . I don't know.

[*The* Sins *become bolder.* HOPE *goes out after* GROUNDWATER. FAITH *remains.*

HAMISH. Elsie, was that all right, what you said at lunch that you're a millionaire?

ELSIE. Yes. . . . I suppose so.

HAMISH. Honest?

ELSIE. More or less.

HAMISH. Listen, you're looking dashed lovely. Sort of drooping. See here, what about it?

ELSIE. What about what?

HAMISH. What about what you said about me converting you, and so forth? I'll start whenever you like. Now, if you like.

ELSIE. What are you talking about?

HAMISH. You know what I'm talking about. The Dad has blued all his siller on Cat and Dog homes and things, and we haven't a bean, and you're rolling in it; but I don't care. I'll make you care for me if you'll let me.

ELSIE. *You* will?

HAMISH. Yes, me. If you think I've no guts because I'm a parson, why that's easily settled.

[*He tears off his collar, puts down his glass and puts his arms round her.*

Elsie. . . . Sweetheart! Elsie, look at me. What's up? It's not that frightful tick Pettigrew—in there swilling port—is it? He's a frightful tick, really. Look at me.

ELSIE (*laughing*). You do look a mutt. Do you know a Prince of the Blood Royal shot himself on my doorstep last week?

HAMISH. Well, they've probably cleared him away by now. And I don't mind that sort of thing really. I'm very broad-minded. I'm not perfect myself, even, if it comes to that.

ELSIE. No, I don't suppose you are.

HAMISH. What about it, then?

ELSIE. I don't know. I'm in such a funk, somehow. I feel as if virtue had gone out of me, though I don't think I'd any to go. I feel sure of only one thing.

HAMISH. What is that, said he, anxiously?

ELSIE. That no more Princes will shoot themselves on my doorstep—except by accident. . . . Oh, I'd better marry you, I think.

HAMISH. Good business. Extraordinarily good business.

[*They embrace. Enter* PETTIGREW. *He is no longer gorgeous, no longer dynamic. His hands are in his trousers pockets.*

PETTIGREW. Aye, aye! Well, good-afternoon.

ELSIE and HAMISH. Good-afternoon.

PETTIGREW. Good-afternoon, Cook.

FAITH. Good-afternoon. [PETTIGREW *slouches out.*

HAMISH. Lord, I didn't see you, Cook. I beg your pardon.

FAITH. I'm sure it's granted, sir.
Oh, sir, you must be very good to her.

HAMISH. Oh, absolutely, what?

[*The* Sins *gather in a respectful semicircle round the Happy Pair.* FAITH *takes the Stage.*

EPITHALAMION RECITED BY FAITH.

PHŒBUS IS THRONED AND HYMEN'S TORCH IS LIT
AND WE HAD BETTER MAKE THE BEST OF IT.
SO TO THIS HAPPY BLEND OF RIB AND DUST
IF EVIL SPIRITS COME (AS COME THEY MUST),
AS REVERENT SERVITORS LET THEM ATTEND,
UTTERLY PURPOSED NEVER TO OFFEND.
LET AVARICE KEEP THE WOLF-PACK FROM THE DOOR
AND ENVY POLISH UP THE PARQUET FLOOR.
LET SOFT LUXURIA DECK THE WANTON BRIDE

AND GULA KEEP THE INNER MAN SUPPLIED.
LET CAPABLE SUPERBIA NURSE THE KIDS
AND IRA WHACK THEM, AS THE BIBLE BIDS.
LET SLOTH TRANSPORT THE FAMILY JARS AWAY.

ON THESE CONDITIONS ONLY LET THEM STAY—
TO STIMULATE, TO COMFORT, TO SUSTAIN,
OR, AT THE LEAST, PERHAPS TO ENTERTAIN.
AND DO REMEMBER, DEARS, IN THE EVENT
OF FIRE, FLOOD, FAMILIES OR ACCIDENT,
THAT YOU CAN COUNT ETERNALLY ON ME
AND MY SWEET SISTERS, HOPE AND CHARITY

CURTAIN. . . . .

EPILOGUE

If at this point some fool calleth "Author, Author," and if the Audience take it up in accents free of menace, or even if the Fireman in the pit hath to be bribed to raise the cry and it be but taken up by the Programme Sellers, ACCIDIA *will advance before the Curtain and will say :—*

I suppose, strictly speaking, I am the Author of this piece. But I feel very strongly that I must acknowledge my indebtedness to my little friends, Pride, Envy and Avarice, without whose continual encouragement this Play would never have been written. I cannot but refer, moreover, to that great Patron and Master of all young Dramatists, dear Beelzebub, without whose direct inspiration this Play might never have been written.

This Play is really a sort of Propaganda Play. In these days when all sorts of fancy and synthetic vices are being hourly imported from Europe and America, it is up to us to show by our enthusiastic support that Great Britain is still the best breeding-ground for the good old-fashioned Sins that made our fathers what they were.

Good-night, children. Good-night, all the little Imbeciles. Good-night, everybody. Good-night. Good-night.

THE END